

# **ROTHER COUNTRY**



**A SHORT HISTORY AND GUIDE TO THE RIVER  
ROTHER IN EAST SUSSEX, AND THE TOWNS AND  
VILLAGES NEAR TO THE RIVER**

**by BOB CHANTLER**

## FORWARD

There are so many areas of beautiful countryside around the world, more indeed than one can visit in a single lifetime, that it is easy to allow oneself to overlook the area of our birth or everyday life. Brief respites from the busy rush of modern working lives tend to be spent on foreign holidays or at the most popular and desirable destinations in the UK, leaving little time for consideration of our own locality.

Having been born in "1066 country", literally a stone's throw from Hastings Castle, and taught at school about William the Conqueror, it was easy to fall into the trap of believing that the Battle of Hastings was the one and only event of any import in the history and development of the Rother area.

This was to ignore the significance of the Cinque Ports and shipbuilding, of the Wealden iron industry - the largest in the country from Roman times to the start of the Industrial Revolution, and of Romney Marsh sheep, the breed used to establish the huge sheep farming industries in Australia and New Zealand.

This all against a backdrop of truly lovely English countryside abounding with flora and fauna. Along the coast, Camber Sands extend, seemingly forever, seaward from the dunes, and Rye Harbour and Panel Nature Reserves are a haven for resident and migratory birds. The Rother Levels are home to many thousands of sheep, nowadays sharing the land with fields of wheat, and in the early summer brilliant yellow fields of rape extend throughout many parts of the area.

Sheep are prevalent again in the beautiful Brede and Tillingham valleys, from whence the land rises to the Weald with its ancient broadleaved woodland, adorned in spring with a carpet of bluebells.

There is so much to discover and appreciate about 'Rother Country'.

***Bob Chantler***

## INTRODUCTION

This book was written with the intention of tracing the course of the River Rother in East Sussex, by researching the local history of the villages along its length. Initially it discusses the geographical changes to the river over time, and then looks at the main occupations of the population during the last two thousand years, namely ironworking, shipbuilding, sheep farming, and, yes, smuggling.

It soon became obvious that the tributaries of the Rother should be included as the villages near these form an integral part of the history of the area. Hence the Rivers Brede, Tillingham, Dudwell and Limden are included.

Research for local history of the villages and churches soon led to items of wider interest. Such diverse subjects as Granny Smith apples, Guinness, Mithraism, Santiago de Compostella and Half a Sixpence, and the legends of St. George and the Dragon, St. Dunstan and the Devil, and Alfred the Great and the burnt cakes, accompany celebrities such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Sir Paul McCartney, W.G. Grace, Rudyard Kipling and Dame Ellen Terry, not to mention a host of royalty.

For those who wish to skip to these intriguing subjects, a small index is included at the end of the book!

Finally, you will find that many pages are taken up with material relating to the local churches. I make no apology for this, as almost without exception the parish church is the oldest building in the village, and thereby lends access to much early history. Even for those with no particular religious beliefs, there is no doubt that some of the churches are beautiful edifices. A visit to the churches at Rotherfield, Winchelsea, Mayfield and the tiny St Thomas a Beckett on Walland Marsh would be enough to convince you.

Enjoy.

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## The Changing Course of the River Rother

Originally bearing the Celtic name Limen, the **River Rother** used to flow to the sea near Hythe in Kent, some 24 miles to the east of its current estuary at Rye Harbour in East Sussex. The settlement of Lympe was a short distance inland from Hythe, and stood on the old course of the river. The Romans built a harbour there, calling it Portus Lemanus, after the River Limen. Hence Port Lympe where John Aspinall created the now famous Zoo Park.

Since Roman times there have been three significant changes in the course of the Rother, as shown in the sketch below.



Common upstream course from Rotherfield to the Isle of Oxney, leading to four different downstream sections:-



Original course



First change of course circa 350 AD



Second change of course 1287 AD

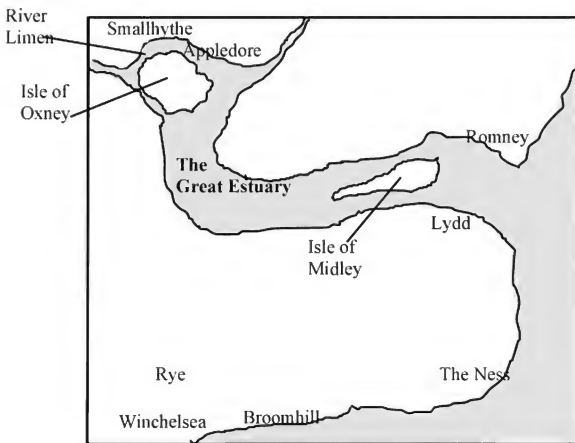


Present day course

Sediment deposited by the river in the lower reaches of its original course would have been gradually choking the estuary at Hythe, and this would have been exacerbated by longshore drift of shingle being pushed across the estuary from the south-west, the

direction of the prevailing wind. At some stage in the mid 4th century, the outlet to the sea became completely blocked, and the Rother diverted across the marshes to reach the sea at Romney, where a wide inlet, known as the 'Great Estuary' was formed. The Saxon port and town of Old Romney grew up on the northern side of the Great Estuary, with the settlement of Lydd on the southern side. The small island of Midley lay in the middle of the Great Estuary, while further upstream the Isle of Oxney directed the Limen/Rother around its northern edge.

The sketch below shows approximately how a Romney Marsh map would have looked in the second half of the first millennium, after the Rother's first change of course.

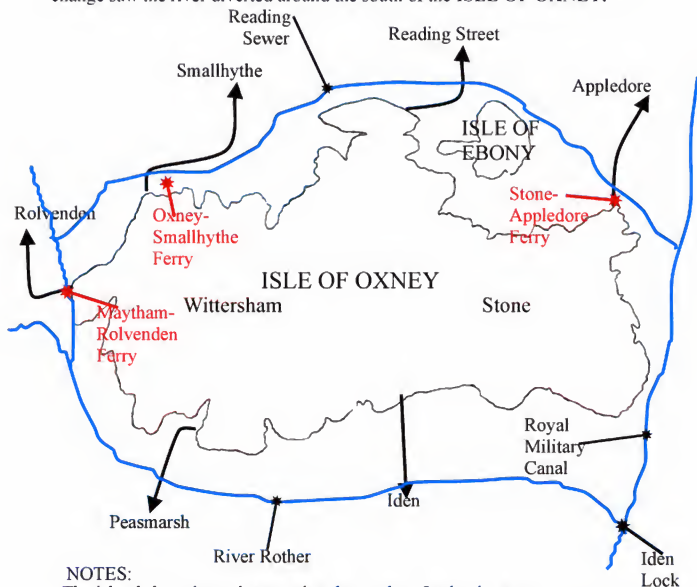


Resources from the Weald, brought down the river from as far upstream as Bodiam on lighters, were transferred to sea-going ships at Romney, which thereby grew into an important and prosperous port.

Settlements were established at Smallhythe and Appledore on navigable stretches of the river, and the port towns of Winchelsea and Broomhill grew up on the coast.

The Rother had not, however, settled on its final course to the sea. Probably the same processes that caused the first change, ie longshore drift and river sediment, continued at the Great Estuary, which by the eleventh century was becoming silted up. A prolonged period of exceptionally bad weather started around 1230, continued on and off for years, and culminated in the Great Storm of 1287, finally blocking the estuary at Romney, and forcing the Rother to find a new route to the sea. It found this near Old Winchelsea where the Rivers Brede and Tillingham already discharged into the English Channel. The Great Storm also destroyed Broomhill and Old Winchelsea.

The Rother remained on this course for nearly four hundred years, until the final change saw the river diverted around the south of the ISLE OF OXNEY.



#### NOTES:

The islands have been drawn using the modern 5m land contour.

The black lines with arrowheads indicate the approximate position and direction of present day roads to adjoining villages.

3 ferries from Oxney are shown in red. There were also ferries (not shown for clarity) north and south from the Isle of Ebony, to Reading Street and Stone respectively.

The River Rother is shown on its current course, to the south of the Isle of Oxney, but before the 17th century its main course was to the north of Oxney where the unfortunately named Reading Sewer now runs. The Rother estuary was tidal in medieval times, forming a river up to a mile wide at Appledore and Smallhythe, and causing flooding south of the Isle of Oxney, on Wittersham Levels. The river was also much deeper, evidenced by finds of sea shells and sand, some 12 metres below the current land level. The severe storms of the late 13th century, led to construction, in the 1330's, of the Knelle Dam across the north-western end of the Wittersham Levels to prevent flooding. Whilst this was successful in limiting floods south of Oxney, it did not help to the north of the island, where the Rother was becoming

more and more silted up. It is possible that the Knelle Dam even exacerbated the situation there, by limiting 'flushing' of the river in flood conditions.

By the late sixteenth century, the embankment of the Knelle Dam was beginning to break down, and failed in 1600 due to the weight of flood water in the Rother valley. The dam was repaired as it protected land on the Wittersham Levels.

Early in the seventeenth century the northern course of the Rother past Smallhythe and Appledore, had become unnavigable. At Reading Street the river had narrowed from 200 - 300 feet to about 20 feet.

In 1635, the Rother was redirected to the south of the Isle of Oxney, with the cutting of a channel through the Wittersham Levels, from Maytham to Blackwall. However, flooding on the Wittersham Levels continued to be a problem during the 17th century, with the New Salt Channel being ineffective, and necessitating ongoing attempts at managing the River. Most river floodwater was held behind a second dam at Blackwell, and between 1680 and 1684, the Craven Channel was cut through the Levels.

Tidal flow was gradually restricted to its present day limit at Scots Float Sluice where a new lock was completed in 1984. Flooding by the Rother still needs to be managed today, as it is for example, at Maytham where flood defence measures can be seen next to Potman's Heath Channel.

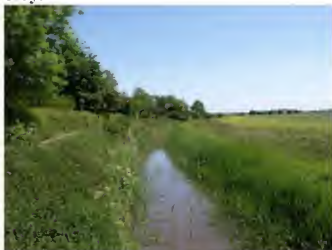


Left: Potman's Heath Channel near Maytham Wharf, former location of the **Maytham - Rolvenden Ferry**. Potman's Heath Channel links the Reading Sewer and the Newmill Channel to the Rother. The retaining wall is part of the flood defences.

Below: The Reading Sewer at Smallhythe, former location of the **Oxney - Smallhythe Ferry**.



Above: The Reading Sewer at Stone, former location of the **Stone - Appledore Ferry**.



## **Industry and agriculture around the Rother**

### **i) Wealden Iron**

The Rother flows from and through the southern part of the area of south-east England known as the Weald. Lying between the two parallel chalk ranges of the North and South Downs, the Weald geological structure is of sandstone ridges and clay valleys.

Weald sandstones contain ironstone, which, with the advent of the Iron Age, in around 800 BC in England, became a valuable resource. With the timber from the extensive Wealden forests to provide fuel, the area became the major iron producing area in the country.

By the first centuries of the Roman era, of 33 iron working sites listed by the Ordnance Survey, two-thirds were in the Weald area.

One such site was at Bardown, near Stonegate in East Sussex. It was excavated in the 1960s and was dated to circa AD 140. Some 5000 square metres of slag up to 3 metres deep in places was discovered at the site, along the south bank of the river Limden.



**The High Weald from Bardown, Stonegate**

The Romans actively encouraged the local iron industry and many bloomery sites in East Sussex have been identified as Roman. Evidence of the involvement of the Roman fleet, *Classis Britannica*, which as well as a navy, was also an imperial supply organisation, has been found at excavations of smelting sites in the form of tiles stamped with the CL BR mark.

During the first centuries of the Roman occupation, an estimated total of 800 tons of iron per year were being produced. This decreased after the middle of the third century to little more than 200 tons per year, and evidence of the industry in Saxon times is hard to find.

We do know, however, that the industry survived and began to prosper again from the fourteenth century, when many of the Weald sites, being close to the Rother and its tributaries, benefitted from the introduction of waterpower to the production process.



The CL BR stamp

Original sites for the bloomeries had depended on the availability of the iron ore in the Weald sandstone, and the abundant supply of timber for fuel from the Wealden forests. The Romans realised that they could benefit from the closeness of the local industry to the sea, both by constructing roads with waste slag from the bloomeries, to move the iron to ports, and by using the rivers themselves as trading highways. The Rother itself was navigable as far upstream as Bodiam, likewise the River Brede as far as Sedlescombe.

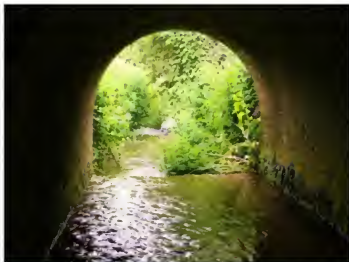
At Bodiam, excavations have shown that there was a substantial Roman port there, and tiles with the CL BR stamp were discovered. Just above the port at Bodiam, an extensive bloomery was found.

Another major archaeological site is at Beauport Park, on the road between Hastings and Battle. Here, a six room Roman bath house was discovered. Bath houses were used by the ironworkers after a hot and dusty shift, and the one at Beauport is particularly well preserved. Some 1600 tiles have been found there displaying the CL BR mark. Along with the large size of the nearby slag heap, it is apparent that the Beauport site was a major one and was run by the *Classis Britannica*. Possible distribution routes would have been via the port at Bulverhythe on the coast near Hastings or via the port at Sedlescombe and then along the River Brede. Given that the bloomery was on the northern downslope from the ridge between Hastings and Battle it is more likely that the route would have been downhill to Sedlescombe, only about 2 miles away.

A major change in the iron industry was brought about in 1490 when the blast furnace was introduced from the Pays de Bray, in eastern Normandy, France. The first recorded blast furnace was at Buxted in East Sussex and would have derived its waterpower from the River Uck which rises in the same general elevated area of the High Weald south of Crowborough as the Rother, but after joining the Ouse, flows to the sea at Newhaven.

More substantial than a bloomery, the blast furnace created much higher temperatures, vastly increasing output, but producing a different type of iron and necessitating this to be refined by a second process in a forge. Both the furnace and the forge required charcoal for fuel and waterpower to operate bellows. Waterpower was also used to work the helve hammers in the forges. Ponds were created by damming streams to ensure a constant supply of water to the machinery. Evidence remains in the form of ponds throughout the Weald called Furnace Pond and Hammer Pond. Other place names are equally revealing.

A drive from Broad Oak down **Furnace Lane** to Beckley, takes you through **Beckley Furnace**, and past **Furnace Farm**, **Forge Farm** and **Furnace Cottages**.



*Left:* The River Tillingham, a tributary of the Rother, looking downstream under the road bridge at Beckley Furnace.

*Below:* This large hammer pond near the Rother at Four Oaks has a new lease of life as a fishing lake. Iris and Hemlock Water-dropwort adorn the bank in late May.





The Weald was again the largest producer of iron in England and by the late sixteenth century there were some 100 furnaces and forges in the area, producing over 9000 tons per year in the 1590s.

As early as the 1540s, some furnaces began to produce cast iron for cannon, required at the time by King Henry VIII for his wars, but later to become the main product, and relegate bar iron to local use only after about 1650.



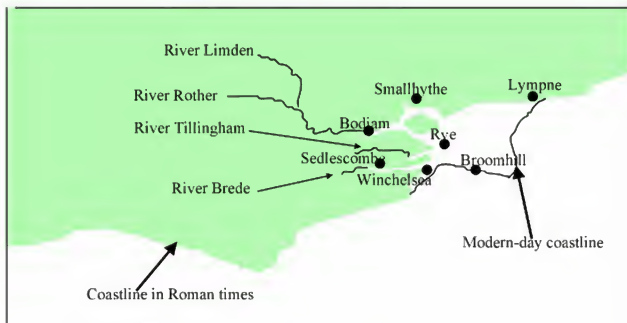
These cannon, seen in the Gun Gardens next to the Ypres Tower in Rye, are reproductions cast by Rye Foundry in the 20th century for display purposes only.

The Weald iron industry flourished until the Industrial Revolution when coke-fired ironworks came into their own. With no local source of coal, the Weald industry was unable to compete commercially. A handful of ironworks in the area continued to operate on a reduced scale, the forge at Ashburnham being the last to close in 1813.



## Industry and agriculture around the Rother

### ii) Shipbuilding



The changing line of the coast and of the course of the Rother in medieval times were major factors in the rise and subsequent decline of the shipbuilding industry in the Rother area. Silting up of the estuaries of the rivers Rother, Tillingham and Brede, movement of shingle along the coastline, known as longshore drift, and reclamation of land for farming by the local inhabitants, all conspired to impact on the fortunes of the ports. Lympne, Smallhythe, Bodiam, Sedlescombe and Rye all ended up inland, whilst Winchelsea and Broomhill were destroyed in the great storm of 1287.

Nowhere has the change been more dramatic than at Smallhythe near Tenterden. At the height of its shipbuilding era, Smallhythe stood on the estuary of the Rother, opposite the Isle of Oxney, at a point where the river was a mile wide, large enough indeed to send the large warships of the time down to the sea. Smallhythe is now a peaceful Kentish hamlet, some 10 miles from the sea, with no obvious indication of its past as the location of an important royal dockyard. The difference between the present day and medieval times at Smallhythe could hardly be more stark. Where once medieval shipwrights worked in the bustling port, now sheep graze on reclaimed farmland as far as the eye can see.

Wealden iron and timber, together with ease of access to the sea, made Smallhythe the perfect location for building the warships of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. During 1416 and 1417, shipbuilders at Smallhythe built the 1,000 ton 'Jesus' for Henry V. It was the second largest medieval ship ever built, and the King visited the port to check on progress of the construction. There was further royal patronage in 1537 when King

Henry VIII ordered his new warship 'The Grand Masters' to be built at Smallhythe. Henry VIII also visited the port during construction of the ship.

Two 21st century pictures below give no clue to Smallhythe's illustrious past. On the left is Smallhythe Place, now a National Trust property visited for its museum illustrating the life of its late owner, Shakespearean actress Dame Ellen Terry, but originally the Port Reeve's (harbour master's) and Customs house. The photograph below right is the drainage ditch called the Reading Sewer which passes under Smallhythe bridge just below Smallhythe Place where the once mighty Rother flowed before its change of course to the south of the Isle of Oxney.



With the closure of the port at Smallhythe when the Rother changed course, the shipbuilding industry in the Rother area downsized dramatically to suit the new circumstances, and little is known of it between the mid 16th and the early 19th centuries.

Although the Rother changed course at Oxney, its downstream route to the sea remained via Rye, where it met two other rivers. Then, as now, the River Tillingham flowed into Rye, with Strand Quay on its left bank, and met the River Brede at the western end of Rock Channel. The combined Tillingham and Brede waters then meet the Rother at the seaward end of Rock Channel.

In the early 1800s shipyards grew up along Strand Quay and Rock Channel. One of the first to have a yard at Rock Channel was Nicholas Harvey, and at Strand Quay it was Hoad Bros. who opened a yard to build sailing trawlers.

Clayton's Register of Shipping, 1865, lists over 20 ships built by Hoad Bros. at Rye between 1850 and 1865. Others were built at their yard in Sandwich, Kent, and there were many more listed as owned by Hoad Bros. without actually stating that they were the builders.

Others with shipbuilding yards at Rye were W.E. Clark, barge builders, H. J. Phillips, and Geo. and Thos. Smith who were not only ship and barge builders, but also timber merchants, saw millers, and wood turners.

The Rye shipyards, including Hoads, were commissioned by the Government in 1855

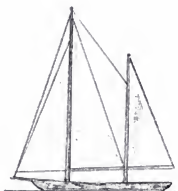
to build 3 ships for use in the Crimean War.

Hoad Bros. normal production included small cutters and ketches, from thirty tons, schooners of the order of 130 tons and more, and brigantines over 200 tons and 100 feet long. The largest vessel listed as built by Hoads was one named the 'Chrysalis'. Built in 1853 for the Australia trade, it weighed in at over 326 tons.

Types of ship built at Rye by Hoad Bros. are shown below. Clockwise from top left:- Cutter, ketch, brigantine, and schooner.



Cutters had a single mast with two or more foresails.



Ketches had two masts, the forward being higher, and the aft (mizzen) being forward of the rudder post.



Schooners had two or more masts, the aftermast being taller or equal in height to the forward masts



Brigantines had two sails, and were square-rigged on the foremast

Over half of the ships built by Hoads were cutters and ketches for the fishing industry, not only used by Rye fishermen, but others around the country. Shetland's last cod smack had been built by Hoads and was sold on to the Faroes in 1908.

The larger merchant ships, the schooners and brigantines were also used around the country, to haul bulk loads of such materials as coal, pig iron, granite, lead, and ballast.

Over the last 100 years, decline of the shipbuilding industry at Rye has gone hand in hand with the continuing silting of the Rother/Brede/Tillingham confluence.

There are currently two companies at Rock Channel building and repairing small boats such as dinghies, tenders and rowing skiffs. Strand Quay and Rock Channel are now popular berths for pleasure craft, although they must wait for the tide before putting to sea.



The western end of Rock Channel in the foreground with the River Brede flowing down from the lock at Harbour Road. The River Tillingham is out of shot, bottom right, emerging from Strand Quay.



Rock Channel looking downstream

## **Industry and Agriculture around the Rother**

### **iii) Hop growing**

Hops are first mentioned in the 'Naturalis Historia', a multi-book encyclopedia written by Pliny the Elder and published circa AD 77. They were probably first used in Egypt as a medicinal herb, and then in Europe to treat digestive ailments and disease of the liver.

There is documentation of hop cultivation being carried on in the 8th century in the Hallertau Valley in Germany, and this region is still the largest producer of hops in the world, amounting to almost 35,000 tonnes in 2005.

The use of hops in brewing in Germany is not mentioned until the 11th century, and it was not until the second half of the 15th century that brewing techniques, developed in neighbouring Flanders, found their way to England.

Around 1524, hops were first grown in the Rother area by Flanders' weavers who had settled there because of the area's thriving wool industry.

After being banned for use in brewing by Henry VIII, the use of hops by the brewers was legalised by Henry's son, Edward VI in 1552.

Hop growing increased steadily to its height in the late nineteenth century when there were approximately 75,000 acres in cultivation. This has now fallen to its early eighteenth century figure of some 20,000 acres, due in part to a change in taste to



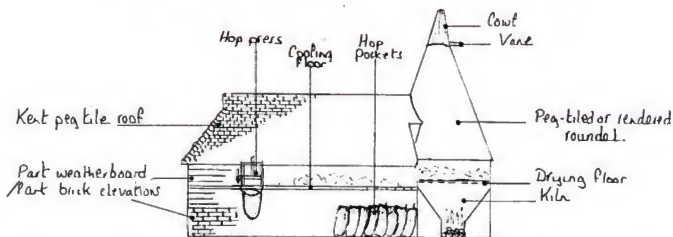
less bitter beers which require fewer hops, but more significantly to the abolition in 1984 of the Hops Marketing Board, allowing competition from international markets. Bumper hop harvests in the 1990's around the world depressed the price which local farmers could obtain for their hops.

Hops were dried in preparation for use in brewing, in buildings called Oast Houses, of which there are hundreds in the Weald area of Kent and East Sussex. Most have now been converted into desirable residential homes.

Essentially Oasts were barns attached to a roundel with a kiln to dry the hops.

Usually conical, but occasionally pyramid shaped, the roundels were topped with white painted wooden cowls and it is these that make the Oasts so distinctive across the Weald countryside.

Throughout most of September, hops were taken from the fields to the Oast Houses in large sacks called pokes. They were dried in the roundel on a wooden floor above a charcoal fire and the hot gases were vented through the cowl. This incorporated a wind vane to align the cowl away from wind direction and thereby help pull the hot air and steam out of the roundel.



After drying, the hops were spread on the 'cooling floor', from where they were packed into large hessian sacks called hop pockets. A manually operated hop press was used to push the hops into a hop pocket suspended from the first floor below the press. The hops were then ready for transportation to the brewery.

Youthful memories of hop picking at Eyelids farm, just south of the Rother on the Sedlescombe to Hawkhurst road, and at Fair Lane, Robertsbridge:

*It was early nineteen fifties well I remember,  
when hop picking I spent the first week of September.*

*Cook's Coaches collected and whisked us from town,  
and took us to hop fields and there set us down.*

*The mornings were taken up with helping to pick,  
the hops from the bines to fill those bins quick.*

*Midday was the hour when it was agreed,  
I could stop all the work without need to plead..*

*To spend the afternoon in play through the bines,  
chasing cowboys and indians along the lines.*

*It never rained, it was always quite hot,  
and the smell of the hops will ne'er be forgot.*



One of the few surviving hop fields. Photographed in Fair lane, Robertsbridge, mid May 2009 with the bines making good growth, already half way up the poles. The author picked hops here in the early 1950s. The 3 kiln oast in the background bears a stone indicating the build date as 1834.



As well as 'local' labour, many of those picking every year came down to Kent from the East End of London and stayed for two, three or more weeks during September in 'hopper's huts'. This temporary accommodation, provided by the growers, was very basic, and although a few were brickbuilt, most were no more than lines of weatherboarded sheds with corrugated roofs. Inside, the pickers had little more than makeshift beds, open fire or stove, table and chairs and an oil lamp.



A line of brick built hopper's huts photographed at The Museum of Kent Life



Typical interiors. On the left, a brick built hut, but the bed is just small branches to lift the occupier off of the damp floor..On the right, a more substantial 'bunk' bed, but the hut is just corrugated iron on a timber framework.

Despite the spartan living conditions, the annual pilgrimage to the Kent hopfields was looked upon by the Eastenders as a welcome break from the hardship and grime of a polluted Victorian London. The time in the hopfields became a paid holiday in the fresh air of the Kent and Sussex countryside.



Payment was often made in the form of hop tokens which would be exchanged for cash at the end of the season, or better still for the growers, spent on their own farm produce.



A typical hop token, measuring 34mm across and stamped B 60 on one side, which would have been the value, and on the reverse with J R, the initials of the issuer/farmer, John Roberts of Four Oaks, Beckley.

The introduction in the late 1950's and early 1960's of machinery to pick the hops was to end this traditional seasonal work for both local and East End labour.

## **Industry and Agriculture around the Rother**

### **iv) Romney Marsh Sheep**

The region to the east of the lower reaches of the Rother, known as Romney Marsh, was originally tidal saltmarsh. The Rother deposited areas of potentially fertile Wealden clay, forming islands as it silted-up and changed course, whilst the local population, between the years 1150 and 1400, constructed dykes to keep the sea at bay, forming rich non-tidal land.

The medieval longwool sheep of the area thrived on the rich grazing land of Romney Marsh and developed a certain resistance to foot rot and liver fluke, two hazards normally associated with sheep on wet pasture. The breed recognized by 1800 as 'Romney Marsh' was improved by crossing with Bakewell's English Leicester. By the middle of the nineteenth century the breed was so successful that export of the sheep was started. The first recorded shipment is of twenty animals from Stone, near Wittersham, to New Zealand aboard the Cornwall, in 1853. Export to Australia started in 1872. In all, 43 countries around the world imported Romney Marsh Sheep.



These two may have cousins all over the world, but seem quite content at home on the Rother Levels where they posed for the camera.

Although the land at Romney Marsh, after reclamation from the sea, developed into rich pasture for the sheep, the human population was less fortunate. The damp conditions and still water were ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes, and 'marsh fever' - actually malaria - became prevalent by the fifteenth century. Poverty exacerbated the situation and the sixteenth century on the Marsh was characterised by deserted houses, farms and churches as the human population dwindled.

The farms were bought up by absentee landowners and merged into large holdings which were used almost exclusively for the Romney Marsh sheep. The landlords used self-employed 'lookers' to tend and move the flocks between pastures. These shepherds often worked for more than one landowner and would sometimes be away from home for weeks on end, especially at lambing time.

Refuge for the shepherds took the form of single room 'lookers huts', perhaps 10' by 8' with a fireplace and straw bed. In the Rother and Romney Marsh areas these huts were normally brick built with a clay-tiled roof, whilst in other parts of the country they were mobile structures which could be wheeled or horse drawn to different locations.

In addition to shelter and sleep, lookers huts were used for cooking food caught by the looker or brought by his family, for tending to sick or injured sheep, and for storage of tools.



The picture is of a Looker's Hut on the Rother Levels south of Wittersham. As with most, it is in a state of disrepair, probably not used since the early 1900's. This one was surrounded by wheat in 2009, but sheep were in the adjoining fields and, despite the growth in cultivation of rape, they continue to form by far the largest sector of farming in the area.

## Industry and Agriculture around the Rother

### v) Smuggling

Smuggling in south-east England was established as early as the 13th century. The people in and around the Cinque Ports had become used to the privileges, including tax exemptions, bestowed upon them in return for providing and maintaining a fleet for the King. The introduction, therefore, of any tax which affected the local economy was unwelcome in the extreme. In 1275 a tax of £3 on every exported bag of wool from the sheep on Romney Marsh, was imposed, and this was doubled in 1298. It is no surprise then, that wool smuggling from Romney Marsh expanded as a result. Centuries later, the imposition of import taxes had the same effect, and smuggling of tea, gin, brandy, tobacco, and other 'luxury' goods, expanded rapidly from the early 1700s.

Smugglers, or 'owlers' as they were originally known on Romney Marsh, presumably after the owl calls which they used to signal to one another at night, were at first romanticised and to some extent supported by the local population who considered wool taxes an unmerited imposition. The free trade in wool, however, had expanded to such an extent by the early 17th century, that public opinion had begun to turn against the owlers. In 1660, wool exports were banned, and in 1662 the death penalty was introduced for wool smuggling. Unfortunately, rather than curtailing the illegal trade, the new legislation led to smugglers organising themselves into armed gangs, who thought that they 'might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb' and therefore had no scruples about shooting any pursuing customs men. As the gangs became more and more lawless, they finally lost their public support.



Left. The Ypres Tower at Rye was used as a prison for smugglers, and is now a museum. Rye at the time was a coastal town and provided easy access for the smugglers ships, which could be quickly unloaded and their cargoes moved to 'safe' houses in the town. With buildings standing closely together on narrow cobbled streets and lanes, Rye was ideal for the smuggling gangs.

One of the most infamous and violent smuggling gangs was the Hawhurst Gang. Based at the Oak and Ivy Inn at Hawhurst, the gang also had various haunts in Rye, including the Mermaid Inn, the London Trader Inn, the Flushing Inn, and the Olde Bell Inn.



The Mermaid Inn, Mermaid Street, Rye.

The picturesque Mermaid Inn is probably one of the most photographed inns in the country, and rightly so. The Norman cellars date from around 1156, and from them, a tunnel ran to the Olde Bell Inn in The Mint, which runs parallel to Mermaid Street. The Olde Bell itself had a revolving cupboard for fast getaway, and a connecting door to the adjoining building, as well as the tunnel to the Mermaid. The Olde Bell was built in 1390 and became an alehouse in 1420, the same year that the Mermaid was rebuilt.



There are numerous other remnants of the smuggling industry in Rye. Examples of interconnecting attics, secret passages, cellars with tunnels to nearby buildings, and, as at the old Bakery in Market Street, secret lifts to move contraband to the attic, where it was out of sight until onward shipment. All of this could not have continued without at least some measure of support from the local population.

Shipbuilders at Rye also became involved with the smuggling industry, becoming accomplished at constructing ships with hidden compartments. Most famous of these was the 'Sally' which had two hulls, one inside the other, with a 5 inch gap between the two, for hiding illegal imports.



Picturesque Traders Passage. On the corner with Mermaid Street was the infamous London Trader Inn, formerly a notorious smugglers' haunt, now a private residence.

There are many stories which illustrate the power wielded by the onshore smuggling gangs. At the height of their power, it is said that the Hawkhurst Gang could quickly muster an 'army' of up to 500 men. The leaders were able to take liquid refreshment at The Mermaid, with their pistols loaded and laid in full view on the tables. Often arrested smugglers would be bailed all too quickly. On one occasion, in 1688, a customs officer was attacked by 50 armed men at Camber, when on his way back to Rye from Lydd, having delivered some of the same men into custody just a few hours earlier. Another ploy by the owlers was to send captured revenue men on a short trip to France. In 1742 two such unfortunate officers made it back to Rye after a weekend break, and were surprised to find their horses waiting for them outside the Old George Inn at Rye.

Influence of the Hawkhurst Gang was not limited to their own area. In 1746 they travelled some 120 miles to Poole in Dorset to recover a consignment of tea which had been seized by the Customs.



Most of the churches on Romney Marsh were used at one time or another by smugglers to conceal their goods.

Snargate Church, pictured left, is a good example. On the wall is a faint painted drawing of a ship, and this is supposed to indicate that the church was a safe-house for the owlers.

It is said that at times the church smelt so strongly of stored tobacco that the vicar could locate the church in thick marsh fog with his nose!



## The Towns & Villages near the River Rother

### i) Rye Harbour

Rye Harbour village grew up at the estuary of the River Rother around the turn of the 19th century, although the shoreline is now approximately one kilometre to the south of the original buildings. A map of 1819 is the first to show the beginnings of a village at Rye Harbour. A few houses opposite the old pier head, were probably fishermen's homes and accomodation for the harbourmaster and Customs officers.

A Martello Tower, number 28 of the original 74 along the south coast, was built between 1805 and 1808 overlooking the Rother at Rye Harbour. The Martello Towers were built as a line of defence against the threatened invasion by the French, but by the time they were completed, Napoleon had been defeated at Trafalgar and abandoned his plan to conquer England, instead turning his attentions to central Europe and the Danube. The towers were exceedingly strong, being constructed with walls up to 13 feet thick on the seaward side. The ground floor was used for stores, whilst the middle floor, which was accessed from a doorway at the rear, 10 feet above ground, was used to garrison troops, normally 1 officer and 24 men. The top was used for mounting heavy weaponry.



Martello Tower 28

Once the threat of invasion by France had receded, Tower 28 was used by the men of the Coastal Blockade, which had been formed to deal with smuggling. It was later put to use to house the Coast Guards before they had their own houses, after which Census returns show that in 1861 and 1871 the Tower was occupied by men of the Royal Artillery Coastal Battery. Finally, during the Second World War, Martello Tower 28 was used as an observation post to warn of the approach of German planes.

By 1849 the village had expanded enough for the vicar of Icklesham, the Reverend HBW Churton, to direct the building of Rye Harbour's own church.



The Church of the Holy Spirit, Rye Harbour.

The churchyard at the Holy Spirit is home to a memorial to the crew of the Mary Stanford lifeboat which capsized in a gale on the 15th November 1928. All 17 lifeboatmen on board were drowned as the Mary Stanford returned into the harbour after attending to an emergency call. There is a further memorial at Winchelsea Church where a stained glass window commemorates the lost crew.



By the early 1900's, the village had grown around the busy harbour. The ferry pictured above was needed to get to the opposite bank. The picture below is dated circa 1906 and shows a barge in the foreground, the old lighthouse and a paddlesteamer on the right, and a row of rail trucks at the rail terminal near to the William the Conqueror public house on the left.



26 All pictures on this page are courtesy of **RYEHARBOUR.NET**, which features many more images and related information, and is highly recommended for those interested further in Rye Harbour.



In 1970, East Sussex County Council established the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, on the shingle and saltmarsh lying to the west of the river Rother, between Rye Harbour village and the estuary, and to the south of the River Brede, between Rye and Winchelsea. The Reserve covers 800 acres, and includes a variety of habitats such as shingle ridges, marsh, saltmarsh, intertidal sand and mud, drainage ditches, and pits. There are four large expanses of water, Castle Water, the Ternery Pool, the Long Pit, and the Narrow Pit, and many smaller pools.

The diverse habitat is home to an extraordinary range of birdlife, insects, invertebrates, and plants. There are over 150 species that are rare and endangered.

There are good footpaths around the Reserve, 4 bird hides, and public access is free.

Volunteers run an information centre at Lime Kiln Cottage at weekends.

Right: Cormorants abound at Castle Water.



Camber Castle lies to the north of the nature reserve between Rye and Winchelsea. It was formerly called Winchelsea Castle, which would perhaps still be more sensible, as Camber village lies on the other side of Rye and the Rother.

The Castle was built on a shingle ridge on the coast in 1539 by King Henry VIII, to protect the entrances to Rye and Winchelsea harbours from the threat of French invasion. The succeeding 100 years saw more and more shingle deposited along the coast in front of the castle, such that cannon fire from the castle would no longer reach enemy ships. The castle was abandoned in 1637, and is now managed by English Heritage.



Shown right is the entrance to Rye Harbour, and the western end of Camber Sands. In the background, some of the 26 turbines at the recently opened wind farm, are visible on the horizon.

Camber Sands extend 7 miles eastward from Rye Harbour. The award-winning sands are visited by thousands of holidaymakers every year, and are much favoured by film makers. The sands and dunes were used in making the epic war film, 'The Longest Day'.

## The Towns & Villages near the River Rother

### ii) Rye

The ancient town of Rye can quite correctly be said to be 'steeped in history', with knowledge of events from before the Conquest. In the early 11th century the small Saxon fishing port was part of the Manor of Rameslie, which also included lands around Old Winchelsea and Hastings. The manor was promised to the Abbey of Fecamp in Normandy, by Ethelred the Unready, who took shelter at the Abbey after fleeing from Danish Vikings in 1014. Ethelred died before making good to his promise, but his widow, Emma of Normandy, remarried to King Cnut and he duly confirmed the transfer of Rye to the Abbey.

The Royal Deed of Gift remained in force until 1247, when King Henry III revoked the order and returned most of the area to the English Crown. One area of land, however, stayed under the control of the Abbey of Fecamp and became known as Rye Foreign. This was finally returned to English control by Henry VIII during the Reformation, although the name survives to this day.

Thus, when the building of a new church, on the hill at the centre of the town, was started early in the 12th century, Rye was still under the control of the Abbey at Fecamp. This undoubtedly influenced the construction and led to the impressive church, sometimes referred to as the cathedral of East Sussex, seen at Rye today.

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin has stood aloof above the surrounding buildings in Church Square for more than 900 years, surviving the hostile attention of weather and man.

During a French invasion in 1377, the church, along with much of the town, was looted and set on fire. The church stonework survived, but the timbers were destroyed, causing the roof

to collapse. The church bells were stolen and taken to France along with other loot. Much of this was recovered the following year, when Rye and Winchelsea men sailed to France, sacked two towns, and returned with the church bells and other stolen items. The church interior and roof were rebuilt, and one of the bells was rehung, whilst the other was installed in nearby Watchbell Street to be used to warn of any further invasion attempt. It was returned to the church in the early 1500s. A few years later, circa 1561, a new clock was fitted to the church, and is now one of the oldest church turret clocks in the country still working.



The Ypres Tower stands a few yards from St Mary's Church, and both buildings are clearly visible from the area around the Rother, to the south. Any troops at the Tower would have had uninterrupted views out to sea, so that they had the earliest warning of the approach of hostile ships.

During the Hundred Years' War (actually 116 years, from 1337 to 1453, but with short periods of peace) the French attacked and burnt Rye on at least three occasions, in 1339, 1377, and 1448. There is some debate as to the exact age of the Ypres Tower, but there is no doubt that the prospect of war with France led to attempts to fortify Rye with town walls and gates. The Tower was probably built in the 14th century, at the same time as the walls, but some believe that it was part of a castle planned for Rye much earlier, in the reign of Henry III, between 1230 and 1250. The Tower architecture, though, and some details of construction, are much like those of Landgate, seeming to indicate that they were built around the same time. Landgate itself is variously dated from between 1329 and 1340, but was, in any case, built during the early years of Edward III's reign when he laid claim to the French throne, thereby leading to the Hundred Years' War.



The Ypres Tower and adjacent Gun Gardens. The River Rother is in the background.

The Tower is a three storey building with a turret at each corner, one of which carries a spiral staircase. Windows in the turrets were originally just arrow-slits, and the main entrance is on the town side, giving defenders some protection when taken with the adjoining 12 feet high town walls.

After the threat of invasion had passed, the Tower was used for a short time as a court building, and then in 1430, it became a private residence for a John de Ypres, whose name, of course, the Tower still bears.

At the end of the 15th century the Ypres Tower was leased back to Rye Corporation, who soon after, in 1518, bought the freehold for £26. It became the town's prison, housing smugglers amongst others, until 1865, and then a police lock-up until 1891. Following that the Tower was used as a mortuary until 1959, and now houses the Rye Castle Museum.

Although, as mentioned previously, there is some debate about the build date of Landgate, a plaque on the building itself states that it was 1329, and bearing in mind that it has now survived almost 700 years, a decade either way is perhaps of little consequence. Unfortunately, the other three gates, Strandgate, Baddings Gate and Postern Gate, have not survived.

Despite the passage of time, it is still possible to visualise the original structure of Landgate, which was extended with a third floor late in the 13th century, at the time of construction of the town walls. The central room over the arch is flanked either side by a tower with arrow-slit windows. Fortifications also included a portcullis, which was taken down in 1735, a drawbridge, and corbelled machicolations, still visible, through which boiling liquid and stones could be thrown onto attackers below.



Sadly, nothing remains of the Strandgate which was taken down in 1736, along with the Postern Gate. The Strandgate guarded the entrance to the town from the sea, standing as it did at the foot of Mermaid Street where Strand Quay provided mooring for up to 200 ships.

After the French sacking of the town in 1377, Rye was granted a charter to build walls to enclose the town. These stone walls were completed several years later and ran from the Strandgate, around the west and north of the town, up to the Landgate. Steep cliffs on the south and east precluded the need for walls there.

A long section of the stone wall, at the back of the Cinque Ports Street carpark, near to Conduit Hill, is still in place. The photograph shows some of this wall, now with more modern



brick buttresses and extended upwards with brickwork.

Despite the walls, the fortified gates and the Ypres Tower, Rye was attacked again by the French, towards the end of the Hundred Years' War, in 1448/9. In 1588, at the time of the Spanish Armada, brick arches were made in the Landgate, for gun placements, but these were never needed.

A copy of the Symondons map in Rye Town Hall, dated 1594, confirms that there has been a windmill by the River Tillingham at Rye for over 400 years. The current mill, which is now a guesthouse, seems to be on the same site on Gibbet's Marsh (more on this later) as the one indicated on the ancient map.

Two views of Rye Windmill.

Right: From across the River Tillingham  
Below: From the south across the railway line.



The first record of a miller at Rye was one Thomas Chatterton, who built a post mill in 1758. Post mills were so named because of the large upright post which supported the whole of the body of the mill, allowing

it to rotate to face the wind. Post mills were largely superseded by smock mills, named from their smock-like shape, and which had a fixed main body with a rotating roof cap, sails, and windshaft. This design allowed the main section, housing the millstones and heavy machinery, to be much larger. In 1820, Frederick Barry acquired Rye Mill from Thomas Chatterton's widow and replaced the post mill with a new smock mill, which was used for milling flour until 1912.

The windmill then became a bakery and was taken over by the Webb family. Disaster befell the mill in 1930, when the bakery ovens overheated resulting in a fire which destroyed all of the wooden structure of the mill, leaving just the two storey brick base in position. The mill re-opened in 1932, having been rebuilt, and continued as a bakery until 1976.

Rye Windmill was then used as a pottery until 1984, when it took on its current role as a guesthouse.

Gibbet's Marsh, on which Rye Windmill stands, was so named because a Gibbet Cage was, for years, suspended from a post there, displaying the body of an executed man.

A Rye butcher, John Breads, was convicted, in 1742, of the murder of the Deputy Mayor, Allen Grebell, in St Mary's churchyard. He was executed, his body was placed in the Rye Gibbet Cage, and hung from a post on the marsh near the River Tillingham. It was left there for a number of years, during which time most of the bones were taken by animals and by superstitious locals who thought that an infusion made from the bones would cure rheumatism.

The case of John Breads is unique in English legal history in that the presiding judge at the trial was the Mayor of Rye, whom John Breads had actually intended to murder in St Mary's churchyard rather than the unfortunate deputy mayor.



The Rye Gibbet Cage

Less gruesome than the Rye Gibbet Cage, was the Rye Pillory, shown right. A pillory was similar to the stocks, but was used with the occupant in a standing position rather than seated, as in the stocks, where the feet were locked as well as the hands. A pillory could be made more archaic by such inhuman practice as nailing an occupant's ear to the pillory.

The Rye Pillory was used for the last time in 1813 to punish a publican who had assisted a French prisoner of war to escape. The guilty man was placed in the pillory, on the beach, with his face turned towards France.



The Rye Gibbet Cage and the Rye Pillory are kept in the attic of Rye Town Hall, along with other historic items.

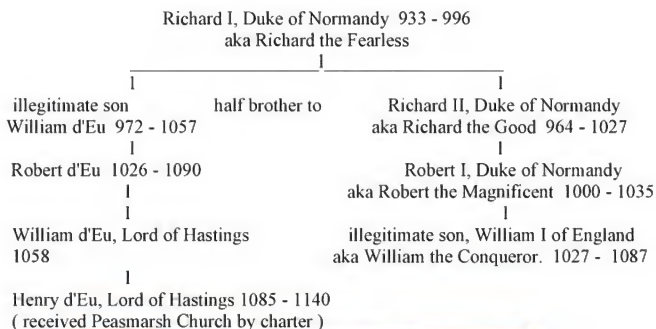


## The Towns & Villages near the River Rother

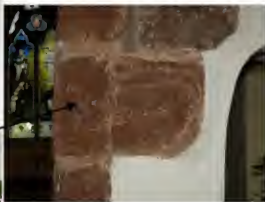
### iii) Peasmarsh

The history of Peasmarsh can, through its church, be traced back to before the time of the Conquest. Peasmarsh was then part of the rape of Hastings, one of the six rapes making up the county of Sussex at the time. The Counts d'Eu became Lords of Hastings, and Peasmarsh church was given, by charter, to Henry d'Eu by his grandfather, Robert d'Eu, who was a cousin of William the Conqueror's father.

The short chart below will help to clarify the ancestral connections:



Parts of the original Norman church, built c1070, have survived, including the west and east walls of the Nave and about half of the Chancel. The Norman Chancel Arch is particularly interesting, being decorated with stylised heraldic animals. The leopard-like creatures have been carved into the iron-sandstone of the arch and are a unique feature of the church.



Above left: The beautiful Norman chancel arch, from the nave.

Left and above right: Detail of the carvings.

Below: Another stone carving, similar to those on the chancel arch, seen on the external wall above the small priest's doorway. It is not obvious what animal this depicts.







Carvings of other animals can be found on the external walls. At the base of the southeast chancel buttress, there is a carving depicting a stag, and high up on the diagonal buttress at the northeast corner of the chancel there is the outline of a flying bird.

Peasmarsh Church and the neighbouring Peasmarsh Place today stand isolated, about a mile away from the village, leading to speculation that the population moved from their original location, at the time of the Black Death, to distance themselves from the churchyard. A similar situation exists at Sandhurst, a few miles to the northwest, where the modern village is even further from the church.

The Black Death, or Plague as it was also called, is thought to have originated in Asia, and brought to Europe by Black Rats aboard merchant ships. In the case of Peasmarsh and Sandhurst it would certainly have been through Rye. The Plague reached its peak in Europe between 1348 and 1350 and is thought to have resulted in the death of between 30% and 60% of the population of Europe. World population was reduced by about one fifth, or some 100 million people.

Peasmarsh Place was built in 1616 on the site of the former manor house, and was the Squire's residence for 250 years until purchased by the Liddell family in 1866. The Very Reverend H.G. Liddell, Dean of Christchurch Oxford was grandfather to the young Alice Liddell who would visit her uncle Charles at Peasmarsh Place. There she listened to fairy tales written for her by the Reverend Charles Dodgson, who was to adopt the pen name Lewis Carroll for publication of his famous stories of 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'.

Peasmarsh is also the location of the much favoured estate which pop megastar Sir Paul McCartney chose to live at, with Linda and his family, when escaping from the world of show business. Although anxious to preserve his privacy, Sir Paul never became aloof, or lost touch with his working class origins. He sent his children to the local schools, and supported local organisations when he could do so without the glare of publicity.

## The Towns & Villages near the River Rother

### iv) Iden

At the time of the Conquest, the tiny Saxon settlement of Iden was taken over by the Normans, becoming part of the holding of Robert d'Eu. Robert was the cousin of William the Conqueror's father, Robert the Magnificent, Duke of Normandy. William himself had been married at Eu cathedral in northern France.

The village is recorded in the Domesday Book, a survey of England ordered by William in 1085. At that time the population count was eight, being 1 'villager', probably the former landowner Ednoth, and 7 'cottagers'.

Not long after this the Normans built the first Iden church with a castellated tower. The tower remains as part of the present All Saints Church, pictured below.



At the end of the thirteenth century, in the Great Storm of 1287, the Rother's estuary at Romney, already partly silted up, became completely blocked causing the river to find a new outlet to the sea at Old Winchelsea. This change of course brought the Rother across the low ground below Iden, close enough for the village to be threatened by attack, sea-going vessels being able to navigate up the river past Iden and as far as Bodiam. King Edward I instructed Edmund de Pashley (Pashley) to construct a castle between Iden and the Rother for defence against the new threat. It was completed before 1318 when it was surrounded by a moat. Iden Castle was to become the pattern for the more famous castle built at Bodiam later in the thirteenth century. Sadly, unlike Bodiam, all that remains of Iden Castle are the gateway and the lines of the moat.

In the fifteenth century, Iden Castle became the home of Alexander of Iden, the Sheriff of Kent, who is famous for having captured, in 1450, Jack Cade leader of the Kentish rebellion against King Henry VI.

When Iden lock was finished in September 1808, it connected the River Rother to the Royal Military Canal, forming a defensive structure along the rear line of Romney Marsh, from Seabrook near Folkestone, to Rye, a distance of some 20 miles. By the following April, the final section from Winchelsea to Cliff End at Pett, had been dug, thereby completing the 28 miles of waterway from Cliff End, via the short canal section, the River Brede, The River Rother, and the long section of canal, to Seabrook.

The Royal Military Canal had been proposed, in the early 1800's, as a line of defence against the very real threat of invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte who envisaged France as the ruler of a united Europe. After the Royal Navy, and the



Royal Military Canal from Iden Lock

constructed along the coastline, the canal was to be a third defensive barrier.

After Prime Minister William Pitt had secured the support of local landowners, work was started on 30 October 1804. The canal was dug entirely by hand, excavated soil being moved in wheelbarrows up onto the northern bank to form ramparts, behind which defending soldiers could take up firing positions. Additional advantage was gained by building bends into the canal, enabling defenders to fire along adjacent sections if an attempt was made to cross. Up to 1500 men were working on the canal at any one time, and despite problems with flooding, the main section to Iden was completed in August 1806, more or less on budget.

Ironically, by this time, Napoleon had been defeated at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and his plans to invade England scuppered. The canal had become a white elephant for the government, who had to try to recover some of the public money spent on its construction by opening it to navigation. There were tolls for public use of both the canal and Military Road. A barge service was introduced, the journey from Rye to Hythe taking some 4 hours. There was, though, never heavy usage of the canal, and the opening in 1851 of the railway line from Hastings to Ashford worsened the situation. The last toll was collected at Iden Lock on 15 December 1909.



A pill-box overlooks the canal.

'Pitt's Ditch', as it was known locally, was never used in warfare, but it was thought worthy of consideration a second time, when in 1935 it was requisitioned by the War Department, as a Second World War looked inevitable, and an invasion by Hitler's army seemed likely. This time concrete pill-boxes were built along the northern banks of the canal.

Thankfully, once again the canal was not needed to help defend against an invasion.

Another pill-box  
by the canal.



The Royal Military Canal is nowadays managed by the Environment Agency and is in a sense fulfilling one of William Pitts original stated benefits of a canal, that of use for regulation of water levels across Romney Marsh.



Perhaps though, the real legacy of the canal is as a haven for wildlife, and as a place of quiet recreation for walkers and fishermen, or for those just wishing to relax, waiting maybe for a glimpse of the elusive kingfisher.

The footpath here next to the Rother, west of Iden Lock, 'trebles' as the Sussex Border Path, the Royal Military Canal Path, and the Saxon Shore Way.

From the number of Oast Houses in the Iden area, one can well imagine the countryside of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hop fields must have then taken up a significant part of the farmland, and provided work, albeit seasonal, for locals. A walk in 2009 on the footpaths that criss-cross the area revealed no hop cultivation at all. Much of the land was given over to grazing for cattle and sheep, although there were also fields of barley, wheat, cabbage, and apple orchards. Large, modern, mechanised farms do not of course provide much work for agricultural labourers and most local residents of working age find their employment away from Iden, returning to enjoy the evenings and weekends in this lovely Kent village.



'The Hop House' from across  
Iden bowling green

## The Towns & Villages near the River Rother

### v) Stone-cum-Ebony

Stone-in-Oxney and Ebony, together called Stone-cum-Ebony, are rather scattered but nonetheless beautiful villages in a largely idyllic setting on the eastern side of the Isle of Oxney.

That Oxney was indeed an island, surrounded by water on all sides, is witnessed by old maps and writings, but is, in any case, still borne out today by names like the Ferry Inn and, next door, Ferry Cottage. A wall in the church of St. Mary displays copy of a benefaction, dated 1556, "To the Poor of this Parish, the sum of thirteen shillings and four pence per Annum, for ever, to be paid out of an Estate lying near Oxney Ferry, now in the occupation of Lord Le Despenser."



Left: This little bridge next to the Ferry Inn at Stone is now all that is required to cross the Reading Street Dyke, the watercourse that runs where the once mighty Rother was a quarter of a mile wide and required the Oxney Ferry to get to the 'mainland' at Appledore.

The church at Stone, dedicated to St. Mary was built in the 15th century and has a 62 ft high tower which can be seen from the Romney Marsh and other surrounding countryside. Views from the castellated tower itself must be splendid.



Inside St. Mary's, the oldest part of the church, the south chapel is home to the organ which was acquired for St. Mary's from Brede Church in 1908. The south chapel also has a sealed up doorway which used to lead to stairs to the loft. The north chapel used to be used as the local school.

The most fascinating item at the church is a Mithraic Roman Altar.



This Roman stone stands in the section of the church under the tower. It is 3 ft 4 ins tall, has a hollowed out top like a basin and the carved figure of a bull, halfway down on all 4 sides.

It is made from Kentish ragstone, probably quarried near Hythe where the Romans built Stutfall Castle and the harbour at Portus Lemanus, on the old course of the Rother, then known as the Limen.

A straightforward journey along the Limen would have brought the stone to Oxney.

It was used as a horse block at the Ferry Inn for many years, before being moved to the vicarage garden, and from there to St. Mary's.

This Mithraic Altar stone dates from between the 1st and 4th centuries AD, when the mystery religion, Mithraism, was popular with the Roman military.

Very little is known for certain about the origins of this mysterious religion. It is variously attributed to have its

foundation in Persia, where the god Mithras was born from a rock, or from a religious culture developed in Rome but having a god with the same name, or from a Greco-Roman theory proposed to explain the movement of heavenly bodies discovered by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus. The latter theory assumed that there must be a previously unknown god powerful enough to move cosmic bodies and therefore capable of controlling the universe.

We will never know!



## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### vi) Isle of Ebony & Reading Street

The Isle of Ebony is also known as the Chapel Bank after the small medieval church which once existed there on the raised ground of the island. This is not the fictional Isle of Ebony from the Arabian Knights!

There are records of the original Ebony church dating from 1070, just after the Conquest, and the site is evidenced by the graveyard which is still there. The manor of Ebony belonged to the monks of Canterbury priory, and a 1311 record shows the monk's granary in receipt of barley grown at Ebony.

As long as the Rother flowed past Ebony, the local population benefited from both the sea trade and from employment at the shipbuilding centre of Smallhythe, but as soon as the Rother changed course away from the Isle of Ebony in the mid 1700s, there was little to keep the locals there.

Earlier, the church had already had its difficulties, suffering loss of many valuable items in the reformation, and then, in 1570 being struck by lightning, and virtually destroyed. The remains of the building were used to construct a smaller chapel, giving the Isle of Ebony its alternative name of Chapel Bank.

Ebony church was always in an isolated position, with the Rother, which was tidal here, flowing around all sides of the island. A ferry was needed to go north to the mainland at Reading Street, and another to go southwards to the Isle of Oxney.

Once the local population had left the Isle of Ebony, the church began to fall into disrepair.

In 1858 the vicar of Appledore and Ebony, the Rev. William Walter Kirby, and his churchwarden at Ebony, George Moon decided to take drastic action.

With the help of local architect S.S. Ceulon, and builders Messrs. Bourne and Chandler, the chapel was taken down stone by stone, transported by horse and cart a mile to Reading Street, and rebuilt there at a cost of £270. The work was completed in only 3 months, an amazingly short time for such an ambitious project.



Above: This record of the church reconstruction at Reading Street is displayed inside the church.





Above: The Church of St Mary the Virgin, Ebony, as seen today.

Right: Two sketch views of the Church as it was before removal in 1858.



Rebuilding closely followed the original, with the exceptions that buttresses were not used, the porch doorway was moved, and an extra window was inserted.



Left: Drawing of an ancient stone crucifix found in the masonry of Ebony Chapel when it was taken down in 1858. The crucifix was mounted on the east gable of the rebuilt church, but was unfortunately destroyed by a German flying bomb during the Second World War.

Nowadays, Reading Street and Ebony are both small hamlets which rely on shops and other facilities found at nearby Tenterden, although there is a well patronised Garden Centre with tea rooms and quality tropical fish centre in Reading Street, opposite St. Mary the Virgin Church.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### vii) Appledore

During the years from the middle of the 4th century to the second half of the 13th century, the River Rother flowed to the sea at Romney, with a mile-wide tidal inlet allowing sea-going vessels access to the seaports of Appledore and Smallhythe.

This left the village open to attack, and in 892 a huge Viking army of up to 10,000 men left Boulogne in northern France, where they were well established, and landed near Appledore or 'Apuldre' as it was then written. The invaders built a fortress at Appledore, whilst the Saxon king, Alfred the Great, responded by constructing a similar base at nearby Newenden. After numerous battles the Vikings were eventually defeated and retreated back to France. They were, however, to return nearly 200 years later, after making Normandy their own, this time to be victorious under Guillaume le Bartard, the Conqueror in 1066.

The Viking invasion of 892 is the first event depicted on a tapestry in St Peter and St Paul Church, Appledore. This remarkable tapestry was worked in 1988 to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the church.

Appledore is next mentioned in the Domesday Book, the record of a survey of England ordered by the Conqueror in 1086. A church is said to have existed at that time, but the present building does not include any stonework of the period.



St Peter and St Paul, Appledore

Some 300 years later, in 1380, the French were next to attack Appledore, sacking the village and burning down the church. This action was part of the Hundred Years War, an extended conflict which was fought to decide the destiny of the French throne. The English kings claimed the throne as descendants of Henry II, who had united England, Normandy, Anjou, and Aquitaine as the Angevin Empire, a kingdom rivalling, and at one time exceeding, the remainder of France. The church was of course rebuilt, and it was enlarged at the same time.

The following year, and not unconnected, because it was partly a rebellion against high taxes to finance the Hundred Years War, was the Great Peasants Revolt of 1381.

The men of Appledore joined the Revolt, and one of their leaders, Wat Tyler, was responsible for the sacking of Home's Place, near the village. Grievancies against the policies of Henry VI, including, again, high taxation, led to Jack Cade's rebellion of 1450 which many Appledore men joined.

As well as housing the tapestry which depicts these events, St Peter and St Paul Church also contains an unusual screen which, rather than just separating the laity in the nave from the clergy in the chancel, extends right across the church in 3 sections, each of different design. It dates from the 14th century.

Visitors to St Peter and St Paul, should also make the short journey south down the narrow minor road to Fairfield where the tiny church of St Thomas a Beckett stands in splendid isolation, atop a mound on Walland Marsh.



Views of St Thomas a Beckett from the west (above) and from the south (right). Romney Marsh sheep make up the majority of residents in the area.



Walland Marsh was claimed from the sea in the 13th century, and a small hamlet grew up in the area where the church of St Thomas a Beckett now stands. Originally the local population probably numbered less than 30 (it was 34 in 1801 when records start, and rose to a maximum of 89 in 1831, after which it decreased throughout the remainder of that century). It seems that, in the 13th century, the local farmers decided they would build a church of a size that met their needs only, rather than a larger building, limited more by funds than by practicality.

The outcome was a church which has been maintained and survives today as a testimony to the dedication of the small local community. The interior, as shown in the photographs below, is immaculate. The 3 level pulpit and box pews are white painted and from the small number of the latter, one can imagine that each box was designated for one of the local families.



Originally constructed of a timber framework with infills of lath and plaster, the church underwent extensive repair in the 15th century when the timber frame was renewed. The lath and plaster was replaced by brickwork in the 18th century, but less than 200 years later, the church was found to be in danger of collapse, necessitating major

rebuilding work. In 1913, the complete roof, turret, chancel, porch, and north wall of the nave, were taken down, and then rebuilt using, as far as possible the original materials.

St Thomas a Beckett remains in use in 2009, there being a service on the first Sunday of each month.



## THE RHEE WALL

As soon as the River Rother changed course due to choking of its estuary at Hythe, by sediment, in the mid 4th century, the river's new estuary at Romney began to suffer with the same problem. By the early 13th century, this had become critical with the inlet almost completely silted up. The people of Romney resolved to deal with the siltation of their harbour by flushing it with water brought from the Rother at Appledore along a man-made channel, which they named the Rhee. Their ambitious plan involved constructing two parallel banks of earth, some 45m apart, to retain and direct water from the Rother over a distance of 12km from Appledore, via Snargate, to Old Romney. Sluices were opened to flush the harbour at low tide.

This was a massive engineering feat at that time, when everything had to be done manually. It was successful for several decades and was extended from the harbour at Old Romney to New Romney in 1258. However, the Great Storm of 1287 gave nature the final say when the river outlet at Romney became completely blocked by shingle, the Rother diverting to the sea at Rye, and the man-made River Rhee being rendered redundant.

The Rhee Wall continued to serve a useful purpose though, helping to prevent flooding on the marsh, and providing a dry causeway for travel. The modern B2080 road and a section of the A259 between Brenzett and Romney were constructed on the raised ground of the Wall.



It is difficult to capture the higher ground of the Rhee Wall with a camera, but the photograph (left) shows the B2080 at Snargate, running above the level of the surrounding fields. The farmhouse has also benefitted from being built in the drier conditions on top of the Rhee Wall.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### viii) Smallhythe

The early history of Smallhythe is that of a busy shipbuilding port at the estuary of the River Rother. In 1416/1417 King Henry V visited Smallhythe to check progress on his warship, The Jesus, the second largest medieval ship ever built.

In 1514 a disaster befell the port when nearly all of the village buildings were burnt down. Rebuilding quickly followed, and included the red brick Smallhythe church, dedicated to St. Mildred, and a new Customs House for the port.

Further royal patronage was received in 1537 when Henry VIII ordered his new warship, 'The Grand Masters', to be built at Smallhythe, and visited the port to see the vessel under construction.

As the Rother's estuary silted up during the 1600s, the river's course was changed to the south of the Isle of Oxney, away from Smallhythe, signalling the end of the port. The Customs House was no longer needed and became a farmhouse, now known as Smallhythe Place.



In 1899, Victorian actress Ellen Terry, 'the Queen of the Theatre', bought Smallhythe Place as a retreat from her life on the stage. Ellen became one of the most loved and respected actresses ever, playing opposite Sir Henry Irving, and touring at home and abroad.

Ellen lived at Smallhythe Place until she passed away in 1928. Her daughter, Edith Craig then decided that a thatched barn in the grounds at Smallhythe Place should be used as a theatre, leading to the formation, in 1931, of the successful Barn Theatre Society. In 1939 Edith transferred Smallhythe Place to the National Trust, who manage it today, and the Barn Theatre is a public venue.



## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### ix) Wittersham



The modern parish of Wittersham, (formerly spoken locally as 'Witsham'), is often taken as synonymous with the Isle of Oxney, although this is not strictly correct as the parish of Stone is also on the Isle of Oxney, and originally there were 3 ancient manors making up the Isle, namely Palstre in the west, Owley to the north, and Wittersham itself, which was subordinate to the Manor of Aldington.

The first known record of the Manor of Wittersham is from 1032 when it was given to the monks of Christchurch, Canterbury for fosterland, ie food and sustenance, by Eadsy/ Eadsige, the chaplain to King Cnut.

Wittersham was not referred to in the Domesday Book of 1086, but the Manor of Palstre was noted as being in the possession of Odo, the Bishop of Bayeaux with whom it remained for only 4 years until the bishop's disgrace.

The next mention of Witrsham itself was in 1407, when Henry IV granted licence to assign the manor of 'Wyghtresham' to the master and fellows of All saints College, Maidstone. The manor-house became known as Wittersham College, and this name was used for hundreds of years, until changed to Wittersham Court, the title it has on an O.S. map of 1905.

The other manors, Palstre and Owley, had many changes of owner over the years and both names survive on present-day farmhouses. As late as 1903, Kelly's Directories listed Palstre Court as in the ownership of Col. Lawrence Heyworth, Lord of the Manor of Palstre. 16th century Palstre Court Farmhouse is close to the site of the moat which surrounded the ancient Palstre manor-house.

There was also a medieval moat at Owley and this is listed as a Scheduled Monument. The buildings at Owley in the 19th century included the farmhouse, 2 oasts, 2 cottages, a thatched barn and stables. Owley Farm is now used by Black Forge Art for production of their quality metal artwork.



Right: The Church of St. John the Baptist, Wittersham.

The first recorded rector at Wittersham church, from a list inside the church, was Thomas de Shenefield in 1232.

This, taken with the nave architecture, which is Early English (1180 - 1275) dates the church to late 12th or early 13th century.

There may have been a Norman or even Saxon building on the site before then, but there is no evidence of either.

St. John the Baptist has two aisles, the south one having been added in the early 14th century. The buttressed tower was built at the time of Henry VIII, and the earliest bells were cast in 1609 at Whitechapel.



There were formerly two windmills at Wittersham, both of the 'post' mill type. The Old Post Mill was situated near the village centre, and Stocks Mill about a mile away, east along Stocks Road.

The Old Post Mill is recorded from 1736. It was improved the following century, firstly in 1817, by the then miller, Robert Parton, who raised the mill up onto brick piers, and then in 1870 by the new miller, Thomas Collard, who had a fantail fitted to the mill.

At the turn of the century many mills became redundant due to the decline in demand for locally ground flour, in favour of that ground in large factories, and the Old Post Mill was no exception. It was demolished in 1922 after falling into disrepair.

Right: Stocks Mill, so named because of its location near to the village stocks.

Dated to 1781 by carving on the top of its main post, Stocks Mill could be older than this as it is thought that this is the date of its erection at Wittersham after being moved from nearby Stone.

The white weatherboarded mill, owned by Kent County Council, is the largest post mill in Kent. It sits on a black tarred roundhouse and has no fantail, being 'winded' by hand using its large tail-pole.

It stopped work in 1900, and after extensive renovations, re-opened to the public in 2004.



## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### x) Rolvenden

Rolvenden is not mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, but an earlier ecclesiastical record, the Domesday Monachorum of Christchurch, Canterbury, compiled for Archbishop Lanfranc, probably circa 1070, of dues from each church payable to the Archbishop of Canterbury at Easter includes an entry 'De Ruluindaenne 28d' ( from Rolvenden 28 pence ).

This would have been a wooden Saxon church, which may have survived into the early 13th century, there being no evidence of a stone Norman replacement. The oldest part of the current Rolvenden church is the chancel, which is Early English, and dates from c1210.

A list of Rectors in the church shows the earliest to be John de Waddenton, before 1244. On January 22nd 1244 he received a Dispensation from the Pope to hold two other benefices.



The Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Rolvenden and its Early English chancel

There are two unusual features in the church:



The font is hexagonal, an uncommon shape for Kent churches, and bears the arms of Guldeforde and Culpepper. It has an 18th century wooden cover which could be locked down with hasp and staples, to prevent theft of the holy water by witches or others who might believe that, having been blessed, it possessed magical powers.

Right: The beautiful oak screen which separates the south aisle from the 15th century chapel, built by Sir Edward Guldeforde of Halden Place. Above the chapel is an upstairs room, the 'Squire's Pew', built in 1825, and used by those from the 'Big House' when attending church. It has a table and Chippendale chairs and is still in use by the Barham family of Hole Park.



## ROLVENDEN BUILDINGS



This magnificent Wealden Hall House called Saxbys is on Benenden Road, Rolvenden. The earliest parts date from the 14th century, since when common modifications seem to have enhanced the appearance rather than being detrimental to the original. The alterations and improvements in this case appear to include brick infills under what would have been front 1st floor jetties, the gable-roofed front bay window, and a floor at 1st floor level in the hall, as well as the brick chimney, and very necessary window glazing!



Left; Great Maytham Hall,  
and above: The Hall seen through  
the Clockhouse.

Great Maytham Hall was rebuilt in 1910, but the estate dates from Saxon times. The previous hall was rented by authoress Frances Hodgson Bennett in 1898, and a sealed door in the old walled garden, inspired her to write the children's classic novel, 'The Secret Garden'. The gardens are open to the public on specific dates, as are those at Hole Park on the Benenden Road.

Halden Place is an 18th century Grade 2 listed building in Halden Lane, on the site of Halden Manor. Remains of a medieval moat survive, and there is a cartouche of the Guldeford family on the 17th century stable block.

The Guldeford family owned Halden Manor in medieval times, and John Guldeford was granted a royal licence to crenellate the manor-house on 6 October 1487.

Halden Manor was later one of the holdings of Lady Jane Grey, the 'nine day queen'. Her unsuccessful attempt, in 1553, to prevent the accession of the catholic Mary Tudor, was thwarted after only nine days before she could be

crowned. Henry VIII's daughter, became Queen Mary, had Lady Jane tried for treason, and, after being found guilty and held in The Tower with her sentence suspended, she was eventually executed when her father, the Duke of Suffolk, joined Sir Thomas Wyatt's Rebellion in February 1554.



Right: Rolvenden Windmill stands on a small hill on the Benenden Road, just outside of the village.

It dates from at least as long ago as 1580 when there is an early record of it. The black weatherboarded post mill was restored in 1956 as a memorial to John Nicholas Barham, who died the previous year at the age of only seventeen. Rolvenden Windmill is one of the best surviving post mills of its type in Kent.

It was the mill used in Tommy Steele's film, 'Half a Sixpence'.



Also at Rolvenden, is the C.M. Booth Motor Museum, which houses a collection of vintage cars, including Morgan 3-wheelers, motorcycles and bicycles.

The popular Kent and East Sussex Railway runs near to the village, with Wittersham Road station being about 1 mile away at Rolvenden Layne, and Rolvenden station, which is actually nearer Tenterden, being some 2 miles from the village centre.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### xi) Newenden

The early history of Newenden dates back to the 1st millennium, to King Offa in the eighth century, and King Alfred the Great in the following century.

Offa was King of Mercia (the midlands approximately) from 757 until his death in 796. He gradually extended his influence to include the Kingdom of Kent in 762, Sussex by 771, Wessex in the 780's, by his daughter's marriage to Beofhtric of Wessex, and East Anglia by 794. Although he was the most powerful Anglo-Saxon king before Alfred the Great, he never controlled the vast Kingdom of Northumbria, and was therefore not truly a king of all England.

In 791, King Offa granted the manor of Newenden to the Priory of Christ Church, Canterbury.

King Alfred the Great was born in 849, and became king in 871 after his father, King Aethulwulf, in 855, and then his elder brothers in turn, were killed fighting the Danes (Vikings). In 878 the Anglo-Saxons were defeated in Wessex by the Danes, Alfred escaped, but had to go into hiding.

The famous legend of Alfred and the burnt cakes comes from this time. The story is of Alfred hiding at a peasant's home, and the peasant's wife asking him to look after her baking. Engrossed in making some arrows, Alfred forgot the cakes, allowing them to burn, for which he was chastised by the peasant's wife, who had no idea that he was king.

After a short period in exile, Alfred assembled a new Saxon force from Wessex, with which he defeated the Danish King Guthrum. Having created the fyrd, the first regular army, and the first English navy, he then embarked upon a program of burgh building. The burghs were defensive fortresses, manned by locals who were granted plots of land within the outer enclosure, which Alfred had built along the south coast.



Above: Castle Toll, Newenden

Along Lossenham Lane, at Newenden, on a peninsula of land jutting into Romney Marsh, is Castle Toll, thought to be the central earthworks in the last, and unfinished burgh, named Eorpeburnan.

In 892, the Danes, having landed at Appledore, attacked and destroyed Eorpeburnan, before finally being defeated.



After Anglo-Saxon times, Newenden is next mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, in which it is spelt Newedene. There is then record of the establishment of a Carmelite monk settlement at Newenden in 1242. The Order of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is a catholic religious order founded at the end of the twelfth century on Mount Carmel, Palestine, with contemplative prayer as its focus.

The Church of St. Peter dates from the 14th century, and was probably built on the site of a Saxon building. It has many interesting features, not least the huge square font, which is either Early Norman or even perhaps Saxon.

The font, shown below, was, at one time, taken to Rye where a copy was made and is still in use at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Rye.



The porch, which retains original 14th century stonework, has a small room over, accessed from an oak door in the nave, near to the entrance. It is said that the room was formerly used as a prison.



The chancel is a modern (1931) replacement for the original which collapsed at the end of the 18th century. The tower had also fallen into disrepair and had to be taken down around that time. The present spired tower was built in the 19th century, and the clock was added in 1911 to commemorate King George V's coronation.





Shown above, are two other interesting features of St. Peter's. The 15th century screen forms a vestry in the south aisle. On the opposite side of the nave is a small, mid 18th century, pipe organ.

Newenden is on the main road (A268) from Rye to London, therefore the river crossing is an important one. After the storms of the late thirteenth century, and the change of course of the River Rother, there was severe flooding, at high tide, of areas in the Rother 'delta', including Newenden. Early in the reign of King Edward III, ie soon after 1327, one such high tide was so strong that it destroyed the bridge at Newenden.

A new bridge, dykes, and embankments were built for the local landowners, but many of the embankments had to be taken down by order of the king because they were making the Rother unnavigable upstream at Bodiam and at Salehurst, a market town whose economy was being ruined.

The current three arch humpback bridge was built in 1736. It is single track, with the modern traffic being controlled by traffic lights. The stonework was repaired in recent years.



There is a lovely 24 seat ferry which will take you from Newenden to Bodiam Castle in 45 minutes. For the more energetic, rowing boats are also available for the 4 mile journey to Bodiam.



## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### xii) Northiam

Northiam is situated along elevated ground above the Rother valley. It was recorded in the Domesday Book as Higham, and there is still a Higham Farm at Northiam. In the thirteenth century, 'north' was prefixed to the village name to distinguish it from another Higham, near Winchelsea. North Higham became contracted to Northiam, and much later sounded rather like 'Nojam' when spoken locally.



The parish church of St. Mary, Northiam, dates from Norman times, but little remains of the original building apart from some local iron sandstone work in the lower part of the tower and in the west wall.

The first recorded rector, from a list in the church, was one Hugh de Wengrove, in 1287. The church was improved and enlarged in the fourteenth century when the north and south aisles were added. The St. Nicholas Chantry, a private chapel owned by the Tufton family, was added on the north side of the church in the 1420's.

At the end of the same century the unusual octagonal stone spire was built.

In the mid nineteenth century, the church was renovated and enlarged again, including the construction of another private chapel, this one for the Frewen family, built above their mausoleum in 1845.

The Frewens have been a notable Northiam family since at least the sixteenth century, maybe earlier. The list of church rectors shows four Frewens, John in 1583, John MA in 1628, Thomas in 1654, and Thankful in 1692. It also shows that Accepted Frewen, patron of Thomas, was Archbishop of York in 1660.

Shown right is a wall mounted tablet, one of many memorials in the Frewen Chapel. This one has details of Thomas Frewin, who was born 1811, and became a magistrate in Rutland and Leicestershire, MP for South Leicestershire in 1838, and High Sheriff for Sussex in 1839. He removed to Northiam, and lived back at Brickwall House, the family estate since 1666, and now home to Frewen College, an independent day/boarding school specialising for dyslexic children.



## LITTLE and LARGE at NORTHIAM



Left: 'Little' is this two room house called Smugglers Cottage, on the main road at Northiam. It is approximately 12' x 9', and is supposed to be the smallest house in Sussex. It was once occupied by a family of five.

Below: 'Large' is Great Dixter. The timber framed hall house, built in 1450, has one of the largest surviving halls in the country.



Great Dixter was bought by Nathaniel Lloyd in 1910, and restored by Sir Edward Lutyens, who also laid out the gardens, which include topiary, herbaceous borders, ponds and an exotic garden. The gardens and house are open to the public from April to October.



The village green and the recreation field at Northiam both have connections to famous individuals.

It is said that Queen Elizabeth I picnicked on the village green in 1573, while on a journey to Rye. Perhaps her entourage used the ornate water pump, which is still on the Green, and supplied water to the village until 1907.

The Recreation Field was the venue for an inspection of troops prior to D-Day, by the Prime Ministers of Great Britain, Canada, South Africa, and Southern Rhodesia.



## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### xiii) Bodiam

Bodiam has an interesting church, an arched bridge over the Rother, and is the western terminus for the Kent and East Sussex Railway, but it is really notable for its castle, probably the finest medieval moated castle in England.

With an open central courtyard, round towers at each corner, and square towers halfway along each external wall, the castle is a perfect pattern for the typical plastic buckets, much used by children to make sandcastles on visits to the seaside.

Right: Bodiam Castle from the south, across the Rother.



Right: The castle from the north, showing the wide moat, which is fed by springs, and still surrounds the castle today.

Access to the castle in medieval times was via a wooden bridge, from the west bank of the moat, across to the octagonal island seen in the photograph (the bridge in the foreground, from the north, is a more modern addition).

From the island, attackers had to turn right, through a barbican, of which there are now, sadly, only ruins, towards the north face of the castle. The castle was further defended at its entrance with



portcullises, oak doors, and machicolations overhead. The width of the moat made the castle very secure, until, that is, the advent of cannon, which made it very vulnerable.. For this reason Bodiam was one of the last of this type of castle to be built.

The history of Bodiam Castle dates from the fourteenth century when it was built, but there is evidence of man's occupation of a settlement at Bodiam as far back as Roman times.

There was a substantial Roman port at Bodiam, located to optimise its position on the Rother, navigable for sea-going vessels at that time, and its nearness to ironworkings. Evidence of the Roman Fleet, *Classis Britannica*, was found when tiles bearing the CL BR stamp were excavated nearby, and a bloomery was also discovered above the port.

A settlement called Bodeham is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. It was, at that time, in the possession of Hugh, Count of Eu, who passed the estate to his son, Osbert, the first to style himself from the saxon place name, becoming known as Osbert de Bodcham. The estate remained with the de Bodeham family until it passed to the Wardeux family by marriage and then to Sir Edward Dalyngrigge when he married the Wardeux heiress, Elizabeth. It was Sir Edward who was responsible for the construction of the castle.

Dalyngrigge was one of many soldiers who organised themselves into mercenary groups and plundered regions of France relinquished by Edward III in 1360, midway through the Hundred Years' War. Sir Edward returned from France in 1377, a wealthy man, and was summoned to parliament from 1379 until 1388.

After French attacks on Rye, Winchelsea and Hastings, and in a climate of concern about the real possibility of a French invasion, Sir Edward was granted royal licence, in 1385, to "crenellate his house to protect the inland reaches of the Rother and halt the French advances".

Not content with crenellating his existing house, Bodiam Manor, Dalyngrigge decided to build a castle on a new site close by, and Bodiam Castle was completed by 1390.

The Castle changed hands several times until it became uninhabited in the latter part of the 17th century, and a virtual ruin by 1828 when it was bought for £3000 by John 'Mad Jack' Fuller.

Mad Jack was an eccentric Sussex squire responsible for several 'follies' around the Brightling area, but it was he who saved Bodiam from being dismantled.

Mad Jack's grandson sold the castle for £5000 to Lord Ashcombe in 1864. Ashcombe organised substantial repair work over the next 40 years. Then, in 1916, the castle was bought by Lord Curzon, who continued with its restoration, before leaving it to the National Trust in his will.



Bodiam Castle from the southwest



Ironworking in the Bodiam area was a major industry from Roman times until the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. The need for a readily available source of coal resulted in the rapid growth of ironworking in such areas as South Wales, and a corresponding decline in the Wealden iron industry. The labour force, however, was required for the expansion in agriculture, in particular hop growing, which, having started in the early 1500s, reached its height around Bodiam in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The high incidence of 'agricultural labourer' being shown as occupation on the censuses of the nineteenth century is quite telling.

Hop growing at Bodiam was a major factor leading to the opening of the railway between Robertsbridge and Headcorn - more of this later.

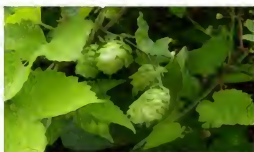
It was also the prerequisite for the introduction to Sussex of the Irish brewing empire of Guinness, who, in 1905, bought two hop farms at Bodiam. Ockham Farm and Udiam Farm together had forty acres of hop fields. By the mid 1940s Guinness had increased this acreage twenty-fold to about 800.

In the mid 1950s the author picked at Eyelids, one of the Guinness hop fields at "Udjam", on Junction Road between Cripp's Corner and Hawkhurst Moor.

Involvement of Guinness at Bodiam was underlined in 1943, when the Dublin brewery took over the lease of the Castle Inn, making it the only Guinness Public House in the United Kingdom. There has been an inn on the site since at least the 15th century, when it was part of the Bodiam Manor estate and catered for those visiting the Castle, and perhaps earlier when it would have served seamen and traders using the Rother.

There may have been one or two smugglers in there as well!

The present day Castle Inn was built in 1885 to replace the former public house, known as The Red Lion, which had to be demolished.



Above: In the centre is one of the few remaining hopfields at Bodiam, but the field in the foreground has been given over to vines - a sign of the times.



The first mention of a bridge at Bodiam appears to be in histories of the castle, when Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, in 1385, was granted permission to crenellate his manor house, but decided to build the castle in 'the best strategic position overlooking the wharfs and bridge spanning the Rother'.

Prior to this there was a ferry which crossed the Rother, which was up to a quarter of a mile wide at Bodiam.

It may not, though, have been very deep, and certainly was not in Roman times when it was shallow enough for construction of a rubble causeway to connect the ironworks to the Roman road.

Right: The current Bodiam bridge looking downstream from the west. The hump-backed three arch bridge was brick-built in 1797. The bridge has been the subject of major repair works on several occasions over the years. It is single track and now subject to a weight restriction.



St. Giles Church, Bodiam stands close to the road to Sandhurst on the hill to the north of the village, and overlooks the castle. The church is Early and Decorated English, probably built around the turn of the thirteenth century, with later additions. The double pitch roof over the west aisle and nave is most unusual.



## THE KENT & EAST SUSSEX RAILWAY

Originally called The Rother Valley Railway, the first section of line from Robertsbridge to Tenterden was opened in 1900. The first station at Tenterden was the one now named Rolvenden, and was followed in 1903 by an extension up into Tenterden proper, where the station was called Tenterden Town. Two years later, the railway was extended to Headcorn, thereby linking the Hastings-Tonbridge line at Robertsbridge to the Folkestone-Tonbridge line at Headcorn. The railway was then renamed The Kent & East Sussex Railway.

It remained independent of the four huge railway companies created by the government in 1923, surviving financial difficulties and providing a service for the local communities, especially the farmers, until all railways were nationalised in 1948. By this time, however, traffic was moving away from the railways, in favour of public transport on the roads. Buses were filling up, whilst many trains were running almost empty. The growth in ownership of private motor cars exacerbated the situation for the railways, and by the early 1950s, passengers on the Kent and East Sussex Railway numbered little more than one hundred per week, and there were 90 trains running each week to service these customers! On the 2nd January 1954 the line was closed for regular passenger traffic. The Tenterden to Headcorn section was closed completely and the track taken up.

The Tenterden to Robertsbridge section survived for goods traffic, with a few special passenger trains in the summer for ramblers, and at hop-picking time for the pickers, until it was closed in 1961.

Thirteen years later, after lengthy legal proceedings and negotiations with the Ministry of Transport, the railway was reopened on a limited 2 mile stretch on 3 February 1974.

Above right: A loco under full steam as it begins the haul up the hill to Tenterden from Rolvenden station, the first section to be reopened .



The railway is now open from Tenterden to Bodiam, passing through some beautiful Rother Valley countryside, and calling at Rolvenden, Wittersham Road, and Nortiam on the way.

The present Railway is famous for its Santa Specials every December. Father Christmas brings the children a nice present on the train, they get a drink, and a chocolate bar, whilst parents and/or grandparents receive a mince pie and their favourite tippie!



## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### xiv) Sandhurst

St. Nicholas Church was built by the early thirteenth century, evidenced by the list of rectors on the church wall which shows Robert de Bardelby appointed 1294, but preceded by 'Richard, Dean of Sandhurst', referred to c1224.



Most of the church, though, appears to be 14th century, with the chancel, shown below, added in the 15th century.



St Nicholas Church boasts stained glass which dates from the mid 15th century. Windows in the south aisle are shown below.

Near right: The centre section of the 'St Michael Window' shows the Archangel St Michael weighing souls. He is holding scales, which have a figure of the devil being weighed down by a figure of a Christian woman with her hand held up in prayer.



Sandhurst was the home of my ancestors from the time Charles Maude, my 7x great grandfather, was appointed rector of St. Nicholas Church, on July 8th 1696, until my great grandfather Godfrey Chantler moved to Romney Marsh, nearly 200 years later.

Reverend Charles was born at Horbury, near Wakefield, West Yorkshire, on Tuesday 29th November 1653, to the well connected Maude family, enabling me to trace some of my direct ancestral lines back to William the Conqueror, and beyond.

Sandhurst is one of the villages, where, as at Peasmarsh, the church is isolated from the village, leading to speculation that the villagers moved away from the churchyard at the time of the Black Death, in 1348/49 to distance themselves from a perceived risk of infection from the corpses.

The distance of the church from the village is demonstrated by the photograph, opposite, which was taken from the churchyard. The view is across fields to the Sandhurst windmill, which is on the main road through the village. The road follows the ridge from Hawkhurst eastwards to Newenden where it ends and was surrounded by inlets from the sea in medieval times. It is the main route from Rye to London, and therefore another reason for the village growing up away from the church.



Sandhurst windmill was built in 1844 to replace an earlier post mill at Boxhurst Farm on the opposite side of the road. The new 'smock' mill was the only five sweep windmill built in Kent, probably the only one in the south of England. In a strong wind the five sails could drive all of its four pairs of stones at the same time. Two stones were used for wheat, one for corn cracking, and the fourth for grinding oats. The windmill was worked in conjunction with a watermill at nearby Bodiam, and supplied local bakers, such as the one in Sandhurst village, with flour. It was used until 1912 but then soon fell into disrepair with a sail being blown off, and the fantail, shutters, and stage taken down, before, in 1945, the smock was demolished leaving only the two storey brick base intact.

Planning permission was granted in 1997 for rebuilding the mill on the existing base, to a largely similar style to the original, and with a change of permitted use to a residential dwelling. The five sails now drive a turbine which can produce up to 20kW for use by the dwelling.



Above: This unusual clocktower was built on the village green at Sandhurst in 1889. It is a 'folly' which was erected in memory of a local Justice of the Peace, Arthur Oakes.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### xv) Salehurst

A village at Salehurst existed in Saxon times, and is recorded in the Domesday Book ordered by the Conqueror in 1086. It was largely destroyed by the Normans before the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and it is possible that the section of the Bayeux Tapestry depicting the burning of Saxon homes was an illustration of the sacking of Salehurst.

The church at Salehurst is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin and dates from the turn of the thirteenth century, with Early and Decorated English architecture. St. Mary the Virgin, Salehurst is the largest rural parish church in East Sussex, and services the larger neighbouring village of Robertsbridge (see next chapter) as well as Salehurst.

Previously, the church also served areas of Etchingham, Hurst Green, and Bodiam, explaining why such a large building was necessary. In medieval times the main road from London came down the hill past the church before crossing the Rother near the site of the old Robertsbridge Abbey.

Right top: Salehurst church from the north. The church grounds extend to 1½ acres and are used for sheep grazing during the grass growing season.

Right centre: The church seen from Fair Lane, to the south. The Rother flows along the line of trees next to the meadow



The Cistercian abbey at Robertsbridge is referred to in more detail in the next chapter, on Robertsbridge, but is relevant here as it had a significant influence on the development of Salehurst church, including construction of the west porch. More significantly, it is through the abbey that the church is endowed with its most important historical item - the Salamander Font.



Salamander stone carvings around the pedestal of the font in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Salehurst.



Although there is one theory that the font is a copy of one that stood in Battle Abbey, the usually accepted account is of the font being a gift from Richard I to the abbot of Robertsbridge Abbey.

The salamander is a creature from medieval mythology that was supposed to be able to live in fire, and it became the emblem of a Crusader.

Richard I, Coeur de Lion, was returning from the Third Crusade, in 1193, when he was captured by Duke Leopold of Austria. The Duke handed him over to the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry VI, and Richard was held captive by the Emperor in the Bavarian Castle of Dernstein.

Abbot William of Robertsbridge Abbey was commissioned by parliament to find the King, and having located him at the Castle of Dernstein, he successfully negotiated his release for a ransom of 150,000 marks. Richard is said to have shown his gratitude to the abbot with the gift of the font.

The other items of important historical interest at Salehurst church are the two Gothic tracery windows in the south aisle. These are glazed with fourteenth century glass in the form of two different birds, drawn in brown on tinted glass. These windows are unique, nothing similar surviving in parish churches in England.

Right: One of the tracery windows with 14th C decorated glass in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Salehurst.





## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### xvi) Robertsbridge

A Cistercian abbey was founded circa 1176 on the site of the present day war memorial in the High Street, Robertsbridge. It was the only abbey of the Cistercian Order in Sussex. The village that grew up around the monastery originally accessed the London road at Salehurst by ferry across the Rother, but soon after the monastery was built, the first abbott, Robert de St. Martin, ordered the construction of a bridge across the river. The bridge was referred to in the Latin monastery records as Pons Roberti, which translates to Robert's bridge and gives the village its name.

In 1210, the monks, probably having outgrown the small chapel in Robertsbridge, moved the abbey about 1 mile east to Salehurst, south of the Rother, and a short distance from Salehurst church on the other side of the river.

The Abbey became holder of the Advowson of Salehurst when it was donated by Sir William de Etchyngham in 1309, after which it was an important influence on the church and village of Salehurst until the Dissolution in 1538.

Having secured the release of Richard I in 1193, Abbot William of Robertsbridge Abbey, and the Abbot of Boxley, were, in 1198, sent as emissaries to the Pope regarding a disagreement with the Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1212, 1221, and 1225 the Abbot of Robertsbridge was sent abroad as king's messenger.

The Abbey hosted royal guests in 1225 and 1264, when Henry III visited, and again in 1295 and 1297 when Edward II stayed at Salehurst. Upon Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1538, King Henry VIII granted the Advowson of Salehurst and the Abbey lands to Sir William Sidney of Penshurst. The abbey lands stayed with the Sidney family until 1720, and the buildings survived until after 1783 when they were the subject of a commission for Sir William Burrell by artist S.H. Grimm.

Soon after this however the Abbey was reduced to ruins, and much stonework used for houses in Robertsbridge, and later even for road repairs. The Abbey ruins are today inaccessible, being part of the abbot's house, which is a private residence.

Right: A carved boss from the Abbey that has been built into the wall of the church rooms in Fair Lane, Robertsbridge.



As with most medieval towns and villages, the development of Robertsbridge was closely linked to the availability of local resources. Wealden ironstone, timber from the Wealden forests, and wood from the local abundance of willow trees, have all been an influence on the way Robertsbridge has evolved over the years.

In 1541 part of the grounds of the Abbey were used for a forge, and a blast furnace was added in 1754. The main product from the furnace was cannon, and this was exported along the Rother.

Timber framed buildings are a feature of Robertsbridge High Street. They were built in the late 14th and the 15th centuries, with oak timber frames constructed by carpenters with mortice and tenon, and cross and butt joints, often away from the building site, before being erected into position ready for roof trusses, and then infilled with willow wattles and daubed with a 'plaster' of clay, straw, and animal dung. Roofs were either thatch, wooden shingles, or stone slates. Later, many timber framed houses were clad with brick, vertical tiles, or weatherboard.



A second use for willow emerged in the nineteenth century when L.J. Nicolls started making cricket bats in his small workshop at Robertsbridge. In 1894 W.G. Grace used a Nicolls bat when he scored his record breaking 100th century. In the 1940s L.J. Nicolls merged with H.J. Gray, and at the same time took over the famous Shaw and Shrewsbury and Wainwright brands. The Gray-Nicolls factory is still based in Robertsbridge, and there is now a second factory in Melbourne.

Since the merger, the list of famous cricketers using Gray-Nicolls bats is almost endless. It includes, at one time, the then captains of all five test playing nations, being Ted Dexter, Ritchie Benaud, Frank Worrell, John Reid and Trevor Goddard. The list goes on with Ian and Greg Chappell, Clive Lloyd, Tony Greig, Barry Richards, and more recently David Gower, Sunhil Gavaskar, and Brian Lara who used the Gray-Nicolls Scoop 2000 bat when compiling the highest ever 1st class innings of 501.

Robertsbridge has other claims to fame, including the first Cub Scout Pack started by Baden Powell, and the murder of a customs officer, Thomas Carswell, at Silver Hill north of Robertsbridge in 1740, when trying to capture members of the infamous Hawkhurst Gang of smugglers.

Finally, mention must be made of the Robertsbridge Codex. This is the name given to sheets of music discovered at Penshurst Place in the mid 19th century amongst documents from Robertsbridge Abbey. These papers had presumably found their way to Penshurst Place after Sir William Sidney of Penshurst was granted the advowson of Salehurst upon Dissolution of the Monastries. These sheets of music are important as they are the earliest known form of entabulated music. They date from around 1360 and were formerly considered to be of Italian origin, but are now thought to be English.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### xvii) Etchingham

Starting upstream by the disused mill at Robertsbridge, a gentle stroll up through the valley beside the Rother leads the walker to Etchingham, where the river is joined, first, by the River Dudwell, and then, within 100 metres, by the River Limden. (Limen was the original name of the Rother).

Right: The confluence of the Rother and the Limden, which is joining from the left, immediately north of the road bridge on the A265 Hawkhurst to Lewes road.

The Dudwell joins from the right just downstream, the other side of the bridge.



Left: The London bound train crossing the Rother just south of Etchingham. The river at this point, is diminutive compared with its size just a few kilometres downstream at Robertsbridge and Bodiam.

Etchingham station was built on the site of the former Etchingham Manor, close to the confluence of the three rivers and next to the main road. It is now much used by commuters for their daily trip to work in the City, and their return to the peace and beauty of the Rother countryside.

Etchingham church was built next to the manor, between the years 1358 and 1363, following a decree by Pope Innocent VI, in 1357, that a new burial ground be consecrated at Etchingham, most likely to relieve pressure on space at Salehurst churchyard which had previously catered for residents from Etchingham, Hurst Green, Robertsbridge, parts of Bodiam, as well as Salehurst.



The Church of The Assumption of Blessed Mary and St. Nicholas, Etchingam, viewed in early summer from the south. The church was built at the start of the 'perpendicular' period, but is really typical of the 'decorated style' which is nominally taken to have finished around 1350.

There are indications that the church replaced an earlier one, possibly a wooden structure, on the same site, evidenced by a list of rectors, and by a reference on the founder's brass to building the church anew. The font is 'early English' in style and probably came from the previous building.

There are two noteworthy items at Etchingam church. Shown right is the weathervane, bearing the coat of arms of the de Etchingam family. It is the oldest brass weathervane in England that is still in its original position.



Secondly, the church is endowed with the largest set of misericords in Sussex, apart from those at Chichester Cathedral. There are nine pairs of these misericords in the choir stalls. They were used to give some measure of support to those standing in the stalls for long periods. They are adorned with naturalistic carving, typical of the 'decorated' style (along with elaborate window tracery).

Below: Two of the nine designs used for the misericords. The carving on the left is of a fox in priests' clothing with six geese, and refers to a proverb of German origin, 'when the fox preaches, look to your geese'. The proverb warns of hidden agendas. On the right, the misericord carving is of two dolphins.





## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### xviii) Mayfield

From Etchingam, the ridge of wealden clay and ironstone that rises through Burwash and Burwash Common/Weald to Heathfield is bordered by the parallel valleys of the River Dudwell to the south, and the River Rother to the north. The latter passes Witherenden and then south of Mayfield, before heading north-west to its source near Rotherfield.

Right: A photograph of the Rother, some 2 kilometres south of Mayfield, taken from a small bridge on Newick Lane between Mayfield and the A265 Heathfield - Broad Oak road.



The history of Mayfield village is inextricably intertwined with Saint Dunstan, who lived from AD 908 until 988 and became a great Saxon Archbishop of Canterbury. The Church of Christ at Canterbury had been given the ancient manor of Mayfield early in the ninth century by King Egbert of Wessex, and his son Ethelwolf. Dunstan himself was canonized in 1021, and apart from becoming Archbishop of Canterbury, this Benedictine monk was advisor to the kings of Wessex, a poet, teacher, musician, and skilled metal worker.

Around AD 960 he built a wooden church at Mayfield, an adjacent wooden residence or 'palace', and a forge. All three are of import and are dealt with on the following pages.

Right: The statue of St. Dunstan in the church dedicated to him at Mayfield.





There are three **LEGENDS of SAINT DUNSTAN**. The one most recounted is of his first meeting with the Devil, who came to his forge disguised as a beautiful woman. However, St. Dunstan spotted the cloven hooves beneath the woman's dress, and grabbed the Devil's nose with his red hot tongs. The Devil escaped by leaping in one bound as far as Tunbridge Wells, where he plunged his burnt nose into the spring and thus gave that town the iron-rich chalybeate waters which it still retains today. An early poetic version is preserved on microfilm in East Sussex Records Office at Lewes:-

While at his forge the sooty Saint  
Old Hobson's plough-share laid,  
In came Old Scratch, with vile intent,  
In form of buxom maid.

In vain all wanton tricks she tries  
The blacksmith to ensnare;  
For as beneath her coats he spies  
The cloven hoofs appear.

Ha! Ha! quoth Vulcan, Is it so?  
Your errand you disclose  
And for your tricks before you go.  
By G... I'll singe your nose.

No need had Dunstan far to look  
A proper tool to seek  
And with his red hot tongs he took  
The Devil by the beak.

How hastily at that same time  
His patient's rostrum stunk!  
While Vulcan pinched, Nick roared and winced  
Like any carted punk.

Safe then from any hellish rout  
Mayfeldians ye may sleep;  
Long as the old Satan has a snout  
And you the forceps keep.

There is also another legend which tells of the Devil paying St. Dunstan a second visit, disguised this time as a weary traveller in need of a horseshoe. Once again Dunstan saw through the disguise and beat the Devil until he pleaded for mercy, and agreed never to enter any house with a horseshoe above the door.

Finally, a third legend recounts how, when St Dunstan's Church was first built, it was not correctly orientated, and the Saint gently pressed the building with his shoulder to restore it to 'the line of sanctity'.

Dunstan was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 960 and it was in that year that he initiated the construction of a wooden church at the 'archbishop's peculiar' jurisdiction of Mayfield. As he did in other remote places in his diocese, Dunstan also had a residence built next to the church for use on his visits. Known as Mayfield Palace, it became one of the great residences of medieval Archbishops of Canterbury. One of St. Dunstan's successors, Archbishop Islip built the Great Hall at the palace. This magnificent banqueting hall, now used as a chapel, is 70 feet long and 39 feet wide.

Right: The gatehouse to Mayfield Palace hides the impressive group of buildings behind. The Palace buildings and adjacent church of St Dunstan with its tall spire, dominate the high ground of the village and are visible from all around the area.



Mayfield Palace and Manor remained in the possession of the Archbishops of Canterbury until they were surrendered by Archbishop Cranmer to King Henry VIII in 1545. The King granted the estate to Sir Edward Northe, for the sum of £7337 6s 8d, with an additional consideration of 500 marks to Cranmer. It passed to Sir John Gresham in April 1546 and then to Sir Thomas Gresham in 1567.

Thomas Gresham was a nobleman who lived during the Tudor period. He was son of the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Richard Gresham, agent to Henry VIII, and became financial advisor to Henry's children and successors, Edward VI and Elizabeth I. Sir Thomas entertained 'Good Queen Bess' at Mayfield Palace in 1573. He was founder of the Royal Exchange and of Gresham College, London.

After Sir Thomas Gresham, the Old Palace passed to the Baker family, local landowners and business gentlemen whose wealth had accrued through the Wealden iron industry. From the Bakers, the estate passed by marriage to the Kirbys, which family provided a succession of four vicars from 1780 until 1897.

Towards the end of the Baker tenure, the Great Hall of the Old Palace was falling into disrepair. In 1740 much of it was dismantled and the stone used for other buildings. The ruins were used by Princess Victoria for a picnic in 1832, and again in 1863 by a group of children from a convent school at St Leonards on Sea, part of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. The then owner of the Mayfield estate, the Dowager Duchess of Leeds granted the site to the society on condition that the palace buildings were restored. This was completed two years later, mass was celebrated on 21st July 1865 in the Great Hall, which remains a splendid chapel to this day, as part of the Roman Catholic girls boarding and day school, St Leonards-Mayfield.

Mayfield was a main centre for the Wealden iron industry until the latter part of the 18th century, when coke fired furnaces in areas close to coal fields heralded the Industrial Revolution. Before then, the iron ore in Weald sandstone, the plentiful fuel from the timber of the Weald forests, and the fast flowing streams all combined to make the Weald the iron-making, industrial capital of England.

After the blast furnace was introduced from Pays de Bray, Normandy, late in the 15th century, (the first one being set up at Buxted in 1490), almost 200 furnaces/forges appeared in the area.

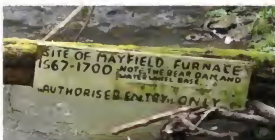
Mayfield Furnace was established just to the north-east of the village, next to one of the streams hurrying down to join the Rother below Mayfield. A large water wheel turned in a wooden trough in the stream, and the power generated was used for the bellows in the blast furnace.

From the 1540s the iron was increasingly used for casting cannon, armaments being needed for the wars during the reign of Henry VIII.

There is some debate as to the casting of the first iron cannon, one account being that it was at the Buxted furnace by a Ralf Hogge, whilst a local rhyme at Mayfield says 'Master Huggett and his man John, they did cast the first cannon'.



Above right: The cannon in Mayfield High Street. It was dug from the remains of Mayfield Furnace in 1864, restored by the Mayfield Local History Society, and mounted in its present position in 1977 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II. The plaque reads: This gun was probably cast during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, at Mayfield Furnace which was owned by Sir Thomas Gresham from about 1567 to 1579.



Above and left: The site of the Mayfield Furnace, showing little evidence of its former use. The furnace pond is now so peaceful that this pair of Canada Geese have chosen it as a suitable nesting spot.



A church at Mayfield was first built in wood in AD 960 by the newly appointed Archbishop Dunstan. As was usual after the Conquest, the Normans replaced the wooden church with a stone one during the 12th century. Most of the Norman church was, however, unfortunately destroyed by a fire that swept through the village in 1389.

The 12th century masonry to the tower and around the adjacent north-west lancet window, survived the fire, as did the north wall footings.

The church was rebuilt early in the 15th century in the then current Perpendicular style, which as its name suggests, heavily features vertical lines.

The roof was raised and clerestory added in the first part of the 16th century.

In 1621 the church was struck by lightning causing further damage.



Left: The north-west lancet window, which survived the 1389 fire, was reglazed in 1907 as a gift from the Rev. Reginald Kirby, vicar of nearby Hadlow Down, to his father and brothers, vicars at St Dunstan's. The design, which depicts St. Dunstan, is from a drawing held in the British Museum. It was made by Messrs. Mayer & Co. of London and Munich.

Right: Of the many memorials in St. Dunstan's, the one shown here, which is actually on the wall by the south door, is probably the most splendid. It is in memory of Thomas Aynscombe and his wife Katherine (nee Eversfield). The Aynscombes were an ancient Mayfield family who had lived at Aylwins on the Palace estate since the early 1400s. Thomas Aynscombe was Reader at the Inner Temple, Clerk of the Peace for Sussex, and a Justice of the Peace. He died in 1620. Katherine was born to the Eversfield family, Lords of the Manor of Hollington, at their manor house, The Grove.

The coats of arms of the two families are paired on the shield above the lectern. On the left are the Aynscombe arms of three fleur-de-lys around a black chevron, whilst on the right is the black bend with three red stars, of the Eversfield family.



The interior of St. Dunstan's Church is one of the most interesting and attractive in the diocese. The photograph below, taken from the nave towards the chancel at Christmas time, includes some of the noteworthy features.

A nativity scene stands towards the right foreground, next to the splendid brass lectern donated by Lady Sykes in 1872, in memory of her brother-in-law, Sir Francis Sykes. Also in brass is one of the two magnificent chandeliers, both installed in the church by the Baker family of Aylwins, whose arms they bear. It is thought that they were used initially to light the church on the occasions of Baker family funerals, which were held at night, as was the custom for 'well to do' families in the 18th century.

Also showing is the church organ (and the organist at practice!) which was installed in 1997 to replace the one damaged by fire in 1994. The organ was manufactured by J.W. Walker & Sons, and has over 1800 pipes and many other sophisticated features. The case is made from American white oak and the upper part depicts eight legends of the life of St. Dunstan



Left: The ornately carved oak parclose screen is at the entrance to the Lady Chapel from the south aisle.

Far left: The font is of dressed sandstone and is dated 1666. The cover was by Mayfield School of Carving in 1909.



## The Towns and Villages near the River Rother

### xix) Rotherfield

Right: A frosty January afternoon at Rotherhurst, south of Rotherfield, where the streams hurry down to join together forming the start of the River Rother.

The tree lines either side of the meadow on the right both hide such streams. The actual source is said to be a spring in the cellar of one of the houses in the village.

The source of the river, which becomes so much larger by the time it reaches the sea at Rye Harbour, is some 35 miles from its estuary.



Rotherfield is one of the villages, in the area covered by this book, that has lots of recorded history. First reference is as far back as AD792 when the then landowner, Duke Berthoald, bequeathed a church on his estate, dedicated to Saint Dionysius, to whose monastery in France, Berthoald had made a pilgrimage. The name Dionysius later became anglicised to Denys, the current church being dedicated to St. Denys.

Before the Conquest, the Saxon landowner at Rotherfield was Earl Godwin, but by the time of the Domesday Survey the estate had been granted to the Norman, Odo of Bayeux, William the Conqueror's half brother. Circa 1100, King William II granted the manor to Richard De Clare. It remained in the hands of that family for over 200 years until the last male De Clare was killed at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314. The manor was then held by the crown until King Edward II granted it to Hugh Le Despencer. It remained with the Le Despenchers until Thomas Le Despencer's daughter and heiress, Isabella, married Richard Beauchamp. Their daughter, Elizabeth, married Edward Neville in 1450 leaving the Nevilles as Lords of the Manor of Rotherfield.

Much of the history of Rotherfield since then reflects the importance of the Neville family in the village. The church, which contains some most interesting features and artefacts, still retains, at the north-east corner, stonework dating from around 1060. This part of the church became the Neville Chapel, and there are examples of Neville emblems both in the church and in the villages of Rotherfield and Eridge, which was part of the ancient manor, as was Mark Cross.

The remainder of St. Denys dates largely from the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, whilst the south aisle is 14th century, and 15th century additions include the tower and spire.



Right: St. Deny's Parish Church, Rotherfield is a Grade 1 listed building.

The 165 feet high spire was unfortunately destroyed in the hurricane of October 1987. It was replaced with a new steel framed spire, lifted into place by helicopter, and clad with chestnut shingle tiles.

Internally, the church has a wealth of interesting items. Shown below is the intricately carved oak font cover, and bottom right is the font itself.



The cover bears the coat of arms of George Neville, who was Lord of the Manor of Rotherfield in 1533 when the cover was made. George was also Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, and was a friend of Henry VIII. He was with Henry in 1520 at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, when the young king met his French counterpart Francis I, in an attempt to agree an alliance against the Holy Roman Emperor. In the event, no such agreement was made and the two parties almost bankrupted the treasuries of the two countries in an attempt to outdo and outspend one another. The banquets took place in pavilions erected in a field near Calais. The fabric for the temporary pavilions was cloth having real gold filaments sewn into it, hence the name of the event, which lasted some three weeks.

Right: The octagonal stone font has its own story to tell. It dates from the late Norman period, but was discovered in a field near the village in the late 19th century where it was being used as a cattle trough. The then rector arranged for its return to the church. Circumstantial evidence regarding removal of the font from the church does perhaps point to one Samuel Wickens who was a church warden from 1814 to 1818 and was also the tenant farmer using the field in 1816.



Rotherfield church is renowned for its wall paintings, the earliest of which date from the 13th century. They were exposed during renovation works in 1893, after having been obscured under redecoration for several centuries. It is likely that there were originally paintings throughout the church, but many have faded badly since being re-exposed. However, there are still some that are reasonably clear, on the chancel arch, and in the Neville Chapel.

Right: The wall above the chancel arch, viewed from the nave, with paintings discernable to the left of and above the arch.



Centre right: This 15th century painting is at the top of the wall above the chancel arch. It depicts Jesus seated on a rainbow with His feet on an orb, representing His dominium over earth, air and water. The sun and moon are above His head, and on either side are angels with trumpets. To the left of Jesus is the Virgin Mary, and to the right is St. John.



Left: This 14th century painting of St. Michael weighing souls is on the left of the chancel arch.

Other paintings are less clear. That in the Neville Chapel is thought to have been of Adam and Eve, whilst there are also depictions of St. Gabriel, and of the Incredulity of St. Thomas.

The interior of St. Deny's must be one of the most beautiful of all parish churches in the county. When I arrived, it was spotless, having just been cleaned by a veritable army of volunteers.

Right: A general view of the chancel from the nave, showing the large Perpendicular style window, with late 19th century pre-Raphaelite stained glass depicting the Te Deum.

The close-ups below are of the gleaming polished brass lectern, in the shape of a bird, and the intricately carved reredos behind the altar.



The south wall of the chancel, dating from the 12th/13th century has this piscina and sedilla.

The small arch is the piscina, which is used for washing the communion vessels, and the two larger arches are the sedilla, which were seats for the clergy. The priest's door is also in the south wall of the chancel to the right of the piscina.

Right: The pulpit was made in 1632 for the Chapel of the Archbishop of York at Bishopsthorpe. By the late 19th century it was no longer required there, and it found its way to St Deny's in 1896 when the then rector, Canon Goodwyn, had it installed as a memorial to his father-in-law, William Thomson, Archbishop of York. It is carved in oak, and the canopy is decorated with salamanders, acorns and oak leaves. The rear support for the canopy is a representation of a winged bird.



REMAINS OF CROSS FROM TOP OF SPIRE  
DESTROYED BY THE GREAT HURRICANE OF  
OCTOBER 16TH 1887

Left: Remains of the cross from the top of the spire destroyed by the Great Hurricane of October 16th 1887.  
Right: This cross on the church wall was made from timbers salvaged from the old spire, and was dedicated by the Bishop of Chichester at the service of thanksgiving for the restoration of the church on October 15th 1889.



Right: This yew tree in St. Deny's churchyard is thought to be at least 1500 years old. It is virtually hollow, and is supported by numerous poles and hawsers, but it still managed to survive the great hurricane.



## The Towns and Villages near the River Brede

### i) Winchelsea

The original village of Old Winchelsea is thought to have developed in the 9th century as a Saxon fishing settlement on a shingle bank across Rye Bay. On the landward side of Old Winchelsea the tidal estuaries of the Rivers Brede and Tillingham formed a wide shallow bay called the Chamber (Camber). This natural anchorage led to Winchelsea and Rye becoming important ports, even before the Norman Conquest, and Winchelsea itself had its own mint.

The Domesday book records a 'novus burgus' or new town in the Manor of Rameslie, but historians disagree as to whether this referred to Rye or Winchelsea.

The royal 'Pipe Rolls' of 1131 and 1164 refer to both towns, and there is a royal charter of 1191 confirming liberties to Rye and Winchelsea. The 'Ancient Towns' of Rye and Winchelsea were added to the Cinque Ports in the 12th century.

The exposed location of Old Winchelsea was to prove disastrous in the 13th century when a prolonged period of extremely stormy weather caused dramatic changes along the coastline between Pett and Hythe. Starting circa 1230, severe storms threatened to flood Old Winchelsea. In 1250 the town was inundated and partially submerged, leading to plans to relocate it on higher ground. King Edward I issued instructions in 1281 to transfer Winchelsea to an alternative site to the north.

Unfortunately this was not done before the catastrophic Great Storm of 1287 which destroyed both Winchelsea and Broomhill, along the other end of the Camber, and also blocked the estuary of the Rother at Romney causing it to divert to reach the sea with the Brede and Tillingham at Rye.

The following year, 1288, the surviving residents of Winchelsea, under the instruction of Edward I, began construction of a new town on the hill called Petit Higham. 'New' Winchelsea was designed on the grid system and proposal for a defensive town wall is evidenced by reference to 'murage' (a tax on construction of such a wall) in 1295. It is doubtful whether all of the wall was ever completed but three gates still survive:



Strand Gate



The New Gate



Pipewell Gate



Plans for a grandiose church at the new Winchelsea, commensurate with the wealth accruing from trade through the port, were made as soon as the town was started in 1288. A list of rectors, in Winchelsea Church, shows that the first record of St. Thomas's, Old Winchelsea is in 1215 and that Adam of Agmondesham became rector in 1277. The same rector is then shown as the incumbent at St. Thomas's, New Winchelsea in 1294.



Above: The Church of St. Thomas, Winchelsea, including some of the ruined parts, looking for all the world like they should be at Bolton Abbey ruins. The church was originally the size of a small cathedral, the section remaining, as seen above, was the chancel. A central tower and spire stood at the east end (left in the photograph) of the chancel, and a huge nave then stretched across what is now the churchyard as far as German Street.

With the tower and nave missing, the original chancel has become the nave, with the Sanctuary and Millennium Altar (shown right) being at the opposite end of the church to the organ and the choir pews.

The photograph includes the millennium altar and the east window, one of the many magnificent stained glass windows in the church.

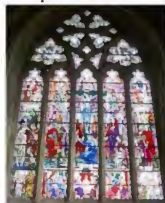
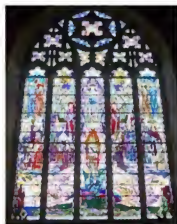




The stained glass at St. Thomas's was installed after World War One as a memorial to the men of the Cinque Ports and the Ancient Towns of Rye and Winchelsea who lost their lives in that conflict. The scheme for the whole church was designed and produced by Dr. Douglas Strachan. The stained glass windows in St. Thomas's are recognised as being some of the finest fitted in modern times.

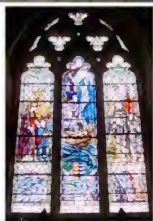
Right: The east window glass depicts the scene detailed in the final Book of The Bible, Revelation ( of St. John ), chapter IV, including Christ on the throne in heaven, the twenty-four elders with white robes and gold crowns, seated around the throne, a rainbow and numerous other items beyond the scope of this small book.

The bald and bearded figure with blue and purple robes, in the fourth light from the left, is St Thomas of Canterbury, the patron Saint of Winchelsea Church.



Left: This window is in the St. Nicholas Chapel, and has as its theme 'Death and Resurrection'. The Crucifixion is clearly shown in the centre, and the Last Supper is along the bottom. On the left is the baptism of Jesus, and above that is a depiction of Him blessing the children.

Far right is Christ being crowned with thorns by the Roman soldiers, and above that is Christ washing the feet of the disciples.



Left: The stained glass in this window, which is in the south wall, is a memorial to commemorate the Rye Harbour lifeboat crew who lost their lives in the Mary Stanford disaster. ( see also Rye Harbour, Page 26 )

Below: The three windows in the north wall depict, in turn from the left, the themes of Land, Air and Fire and Sea.

They constitute the main part of the war memorial and were given by Lord Blanesburgh and dedicated, in 1933 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, to the fallen of the Great War.



An important feature of the Church of St. Thomas are the tombs along the main walls of the nave.

Beneath the stained glass windows on the north wall are three tombs of polished Sussex marble, which were perhaps salvaged from the original St. Thomas's Church in old Winchelsea, after the Great Storm, and brought to the new church.

The effigies are of a knight, a lady, and a youth, and could be members of the local Godfrey family.

An alternative view is that they date from the early years of New Winchelsea and that they are members of the Alard family.

Either way, they would be about 700 years old.

On the opposite (south ) wall are two further tombs, which are indeed figures of Alard family members. The Alard chantry was founded in 1312 by Stephen Alard. The first ( nearer the east ) tomb is that of Gervase Alard, who was appointed Admiral of the Western Fleet by King Edward I, and was the first recorded mayor of the new town. The canopy stonework includes carved sculptures of the heads of Edward and his second wife Queen Margaret.

The other tomb is probably that of Gervase's son Stephen who had founded the chantry and had himself become Admiral of the Cinque Ports and Western Fleet.

Above his tomb are sculptures of the heads of Edward II (murdered at Berkeley Castle in 1327) and his Queen, Isabella.

Right: The stone font, which was restored as part of the WWI memorial improvements and renovations.

The font cover is unique, being intricately carved from oak. The figures are of St Giles, St Leonard and St. Thomas, representing the three original churches, and of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors.

Right: The organ, which is on a gallery above the entrance. It is played from a separate oak console next to the choir stalls.



There had been two churches, St. Thomas's and St Giles's, in old Winchelsea and this was increased to three with the building of the new town, St. Leonards's being added to the other two.

The Church of St. Giles was located to the west of what is now the main A259 road, and served the poorer southern and western parts of the town. It is supposed to be the location of a massacre by the French in 1360, on one of the seven raids that they carried out in the 14th and 15th centuries. St. Giles stood above a track which ran down to the then shoreline, where the Brede estuary formed a natural harbour. Many worshippers were slaughtered in the church and their bodies thrown into the lane, which became known as Deadman's Lane.

In 1413, the church was badly damaged by fire after a lightning strike. It seems that the church struggled on, as rectors were still appointed until the turn of the 16th century. The parish was merged with St. Thomas's in 1541, and masonry from the church was used to repair Rye town walls in 1545. The ruins of St. Giles were finally levelled circa 1790.

St. Leonards Church was built, with royal assent, for the Benedictine Blackfriars in 1317 on a site near Greyfriars hospital. It was moved to a new location, now known as Mill Mound, on the other side of the town, in 1358, probably in the hope that separating the two religious orders would maximise financial support to both.

In the 14th and 15th centuries the Benedictines were responsible throughout Europe for arranging pilgrimages to the holy site of Santiago de Compostela, where legend says that the remains of Saint James are buried. After Rome and Jerusalem, it is the third most important Christian pilgrimage site.

The Blackfriars at St. Leonards, Winchelsea organised the pilgrimages from England, with special barges leaving from the harbour at Winchelsea and landing the pilgrims in Normandy before the trek across northern France and northern Spain to Galicia. It is recorded that the pilgrims numbered some 2400 in the year 1434.

The friary was suppressed in 1538 under King Henry VIII's general dissolution policy. Some remains stood until the end of the 18th century, when they were finally taken down to make way for a windmill.

St. Leonards Windmill was built in 1760 and moved to the site of the former St. Leonard's Church in 1823, but was derelict within 100 years. It suffered damage on several occasions after that, until it was finally blown down in the hurricane of 16th October 1987.

St. Leonard's Mill Mound is now marked by the Winchelsea Millennium Beacon, shown right. The millstones and a little of the mill base can also be seen.



The importance of the medieval port of Winchelsea is evidenced by the royal involvement in reconstruction after the Great Storm, by the number of times that the French targetted the town during the Hundred Years War, and by the great wealth which accrued from trade through the port.

Some of the largest houses built in the new town are indicative of the wealth which came to Winchelsea.

Below: The Armoury, one of the largest and most impressive of old properties surviving in Winchelsea. To the right in the photograph is the Town Well, which was dug in 1851 to save carrying water up the hill. It is reputed to be 80 feet deep.



Above: Entrances to two of Winchelsea's surviving undercrofts/cellars.

It is estimated that there were up to 70 vaulted cellars in Winchelsea at the beginning of the 14th century, each one able to hold an average of 120 casks (hogsheads) or 6300 gallons of imported wine. Some 33 of Winchelsea's cellars are still accessible and guided tours are organised by the Winchelsea Archaeological Society.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Brede

### ii) Icklesham

The first known reference to Icklesham is as early as AD 772, when King Offa of Mercia signed a charter granting land to Oswald, the Bishop of Selsey, to construct a monastery and enlarge a church. The charter is held in the archives of Christ Church, Canterbury. It is in Latin and records part of the land as 3 hides at Icoleshamme. (A hide was an old English measure, usually the amount of land held adequate for one free family and its dependents).

There is no specific reference to Icklesham in the Domesday book of 1086, although 20 years earlier, when William the Conqueror landed near Pevensey, the ridge of land along which Icklesham runs, would certainly have been of strategic interest.

The wintry scene below is of the beautiful Brede valley, taken from close to the charming Queens Head Inn, which was built in 1632. The Brede valley was a tidal inlet in Norman times, and the river would have stretched across the full width of the valley floor.

On the other side of the Brede valley is another ridge of land, running through Udimore, with the Tillingham valley to the north of that.

Further west through the village is Icklesham's other public house, The Robin Hood. Also dating from the 17th century, it was first built in 1607, then rebuilt in 1828 after a serious fire.

To the south of Icklesham is the smaller valley of the Pannel stream/sewer. This is important nowadays for the Pannel Valley Nature Reserve, where 3 bird hides provide opportunities for viewing many resident and migratory birds. The lucky visitor may also be rewarded with sight of such treasures as Bittern, Red Kite, Marsh Harrier, Avocet and Little Egret.





Icklesham windmill stands at the south of the village on Hogg Hill, where there are panoramic views out to sea and across the Romney Marsh. It is a post mill with a large two storey roundhouse and is one of only two surviving post mills in England that have an intact roof mounted fantail for winding.

It was built originally at Pett in 1781, but was moved in 1790 to its present site at Icklesham, where it remained working until 1920.

Two pairs of millstones were used for grinding corn.

The mill is now owned by pop legend, Sir Paul McCartney, who has used it as his recording studio, and maintains it to a high standard.



Two views of Hogg Hill windmill.

Above: From the south in summer.

Below: With leaden skies between snow showers, this photograph was taken from across Icklesham recreation ground, and as well as the windmill on the horizon, it shows the two roundels and cowl of Manor Farm Oast which was built in 1860 and is now an award winning bed and breakfast with 5 star AA rating.





There is no record of a Saxon church on the site of the church at Icklesham, but if one did exist it would probably have been built of wood and would certainly have been replaced by the Normans soon after the Conquest with a more substantial stone building. Early 12th century masonry can be seen on the west wall of All Saints, Icklesham, either side of the modern hexagonal porch. The north and south aisles are 'Later Norman', being added in the second half of the 12th century. A list of rectors and vicars in the church gives a date of 1150 to the first rector, Adam (presumably not the Adam from the Garden of Eden, but nevertheless there cannot be many churches that can claim their first rector to be Adam! ). There are 13th and 14th century additions and alterations, such as the 'Early English' North Chapel and the early 'Decorated' (Geometric) South Chapel.

The Church of All Saints. Icklesham is sometimes referred to as All Saints and St Nicholas, although it is really only the south chapel that is dedicated to St Nicholas.

As one approaches Icklesham from the east, the church stands resplendent amongst trees on the edge of the village. On the other hand, the inside of the church is, perhaps, somewhat uninspiring, which is a disappointment as it is actually the author's 'local'.



Below left: An internal view looking from the nave towards the chancel with the pillars and arches to the south chapel on the right.

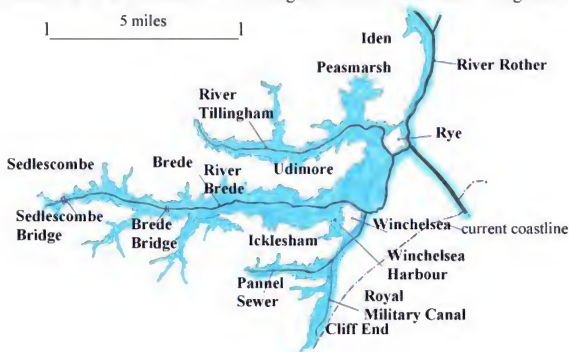
Below right. The two large wall tablets are above the chancel arch and are inscribed with the Ten Commandments.



## The Towns and Villages near the River Brede

### iii) Brede

Brede grew up on high ground above the river valley which, in medieval times, was a tidal estuary up to almost a mile wide in places between Brede and Winchelsea. The map below has been drawn with the current 15 metre height land contour to give an approximation of the extent of water at high tide in the Brede and Tillingham valleys.



Formerly navigable past Brede, the River was important as a highway for transportation of the products of the Brede and Sedlescombe iron workings, and for the natural harbour formed at Winchelsea. On 9th August 1297, the entire Channel Fleet was at anchor in Winchelsea Harbour, and was inspected there by King Edward I, who was planning war against Flanders.

Right: The diminutive River Brede nowadays, looking downstream from Brede Bridge, on the A28 Hastings to Tenterden road.



The farmland on either side of the river often floods in winter, when it gives some idea of the valley's former appearance.

Left: This photograph was taken in February 2010 after days of heavy rain. The central 'zig-zag' section shows the normal course of the river.

The history of Brede can be traced back to before 1030, in which year a charter confirmed that Brede was part of the gift of the Manor of Rameslie which King Cnut had transferred to the Benedictine monks of Fecamp Abbey in Normandy. Cnut made this Royal Deed of Gift to comply with the wishes of former Saxon king, Ethelred the Unready, whose wife Emma of Normandy became Cnut's wife after Ethelred's death. Lands contained in the royal gift were returned to the English Crown at different times, the first being the Rye and Old Winchelsea areas in 1247, when King Henry III's disputes with the continent led to him revoking the Order for the two strategically important ports.

Brede was not returned until much later, circa 1413, when the Benedictine monks were supporting the French against Henry V, in the Hundred Years' War. The final area, which had become known as Rye Foreign, was taken back by a third Henry, the VIII, at the time of the Reformation.

Circa 1140, during their time in control of Brede, the monks from Fecamp Abbey were responsible for starting the building of a new church at the top of the hill overlooking the Brede Valley. The River Brede would have been used by the Normans to import Caen stone from France, for use in the construction, whilst timber was readily available from the Wealden forests. Little of the Norman building remains, although the south aisle pillars and the arches above them are original.

The wall to the north aisle is early 13th century, and much of the rest of the church is 15th century, viz. lady chapel: early 15th, south aisle and tower: mid 15th, chancel: late 15th.

Below: St. George's Church from the east, showing Perpendicular Gothic architecture from the 1490's.



Brede Church is dedicated to St. George, who is, of course, the patron saint of England. Less well known is the long list of other countries, and of cities which also have St. George as their patron saint. The countries are Russia, Georgia, Lithuania, Greece, Germany, Ethiopia, and Portugal. The state of Palestine, and the Spanish provinces of Aragon and Catalonia also name St George as their patron. The long list of cities includes Moscow, Milan, Istanbul, and Barcelona.

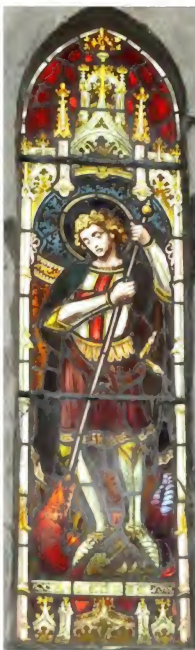
Right: Two interesting items depicting St George are found in Brede Church.

The stained glass window is at the end of the north aisle, and the statue is mounted on the wall on the south side of the chancel arch.

St George replaced Edward the Confessor as patron saint of England, with popular support, after the Holy Crusades.

The legend of St. George and the Dragon originated in the Holy Land in the early 4th century, when he was probably martyred there. The story was brought back from the Crusades, but was not written down in English until the 15th century in a book called *The Golden Legend*. There are alternative versions of this fictitious story, but *The Golden Legend* is most often recounted:

St George was a Christian knight, born at Cappadocia in Turkey. He came to a place called Silene in Libya where the people of the town appeased a dragon living in a nearby lake by feeding it, at first with a sheep every day, and then with a human sacrifice chosen by lots. At the time of St George's arrival the chosen person was the King's daughter, whom he found by the lake. When the dragon appeared, St George, on his horse, charged and wounded the dragon with his spear. He then asked the princess for her girdle which he tied around the dragon's neck and led it to the city. St. George promised to kill the dragon if the people of the city were to convert to Christianity. This they did, the king being the first baptised, and the dragon was duly slain.



The south aisle of St. George's Church is divided by a 15th century oak screen to form, at the eastern end, the Lady Chapel. This chapel, of 'Our Lady of Brede', came to be known as the Oxenbridge Chapel when that family, benefactors to the church, arranged for it to become a private chapel for family burials.

The Oxenbridges were an influential and well connected local family able to trace their ancestry back to the late 13th century. John de Oxenbridge was born in 1298 at Beckley, and before his death c1343 in Brede he had been a juror in 1329 and 1341. There were, next, 4 generations of Oxenbridges with eldest son christened Robert. The second, John's grandson born c1350, became Commissioner of Embankments and in 1405 purchased an estate at Brede with 30 acres of land. In 1431, the third Robert was the first to be recorded as having been buried at St. Georges.

His son, 'Robert the 4th', was born c1414 in Brede, and married Anne Lyvelode. They were buried at St. Georges and their tomb in the floor of the Lady chapel was marked with brasses.



Right: The brasses depicting Robert and Anne Oxenbridge. They are now wall mounted in the chapel. Anne's figure is complete, whilst Robert's is unfortunately damaged, only one leg and the feet remaining.

The small rectangular brass plate, which dates from c1500, bears the names of Robert and Anne's two daughters Margery and Katherine. Their 3rd son, named Goddard, was born c1478 at Brede and became Sheriff of Surrey and Sussex. He was knighted by Henry VIII in 1509. at the latter's coronation..

Right: The tomb of Sir Goddard Oxenbridge in St. Georges.



The tomb chest, dated 1537, is sculpted from Caen stone. Sir Goddard is dressed as a knight in armour with a lion at his feet and his head resting on a helmet.

Sir Goddard's daughter, Elizabeth, was lady-in-waiting to Queen Katherine Parr and was attending to her at Sudeley Castle in 1548 when Katherine died in childbirth. Later Elizabeth was governess to the young Princess Elizabeth before she became Queen.



The Oxenbridge family lived at Brede, from the time John de Oxenbridge removed there early in the 14th century, for some 300 years. Initially they had estates at 'Gate', where Gate Farm now is, and Glesham, before purchasing Ford Place which was later renamed Brede Place.

Below: The stone built 14th century manor house, Brede Place, nestles part way up the hillside, overlooking the Brede Valley.



In 1708 Brede Place was bought by Sir Edward Frewen. The Frewens were another notable local family, (see also Northiam, Page 56) and Brede Place remains in their ownership today. At the time that they took over Brede Place, the Frewens were really more interested in the land, and the house fell into disrepair. In this condition it was reputedly used by smugglers, who, wishing to keep their contraband secreted, concocted a frightening tale about the former owner, Sir Goddard Oxenbridge. They gave Goddard a thoroughly undeserved reputation as a giant who ate a child every night for his supper, and whose ghost, amongst others, haunted the house. The story continues with the children hatching a plan to deal with the giant, who could not be killed with metal weapons, by sawing him in half with a huge wooden saw. To this end, they left a large barrel of mead on the giant's route at Groaning Bridge and waited for him to drink enough to fall into an intoxicated stupor, at which time the children were able to finish him off with the saw. It is said that his blood can still be seen below the bridge, but it is actually merely staining from the iron-rich water.

Brede Place is supposed to be one of the most haunted places in the country, with several different ghosts including that of Moreton Frewen, sister of Lady Randolph Churchill.



## The Towns and Villages near the River Brede

### iv) Sedlescombe

Near to the head of the formerly navigable section of the River Brede at Sedlescombe, the ironworking site at Footlands is one of only a few that can claim to be pre-Roman. Both Sedlescombe and Brede were villages with Roman ironworks, and followed a similar progression, transferring to cast iron production for cannon from the early to mid 16th century after the introduction of the blast furnace, and then to gunpowder production in the late 18th century.

From the second half of the 18th century, gunpowder production became the main industry in the area.

At Brede, ironworks began to be used to make 'black powder' in the late 1770s, and Brede Furnace was converted to a gunpowder mill in 1796. The production process was a highly dangerous occupation, and three major explosions occurred at Brede gunpowder mill in the early 1800s. It was finally completely destroyed by a huge explosion on 7th March 1808.

At Sedlescombe in 1750, Iltonsbath Corn Mill, a watermill by the River Brede at the south of the village, was bought by a Thomas Webster who converted it to a gunpowder mill. It is said to have produced 'the best gunpowder in Europe', but it too had its share of disaster, 4 workers in the sifting house dying in an explosion in 1764.

Unfortunately, nothing remains to be seen of the gunpowder mills.

Right: A view of the River Brede, looking downstream under the road bridge from the approximate area where the mill used to be. The original bridge was built in the 1700s, for the then main road to London. The road through the village and further north follows sections of the Roman road used, in part, to transport iron products to Londinium.



Right: Powdermills Reservoir, between Sedlescombe and Brede, was constructed in 1933 to supply water for Hastings. All sign of the furnace and gunpowder mill are now under the reservoir, but still visible nearby, are the flooded pits formed when ironstone was dug out from the Wadhurst clay.



The wealth created by the iron industry in the sixteenth century is evidenced at Sedlescombe by the large Tudor houses in the village.



Above: The Old Thatch Cottage, dated 1509, and Kester House.

In 1876, an iron pot was discovered at Sedlescombe. It contained some 3000 coins dating back to the time of King Edward the Confessor, who reigned England before the Conquest from 1042 to 1066. It is believed that they were hidden there by King Harold before the Battle of Hastings, which took place about three miles away.

The church at Sedlescombe is about a mile north of the present village centre, but this location would have been central for the ancient parish, ensuring that everyone was in easy walking distance of the church. A small church, probably of wood, on the site was recorded in the Domesday Book, and, as was normal, would soon have been rebuilt in stone by the Normans. Nothing of this remains, however, the 11th or early 12th century nave, and the 13th century chancel extension, having been replaced over the years. The 13th century chancel arch was, in the early 19th century, the last part of the early stone church to be replaced.

The present building has sections built over the centuries from the 14th onwards.

The first rector recorded was a James, but no date is known for his appointment. His successor, Ralph became rector in 1235.

Right; The Church of St. John the Baptist, Sedlescombe, viewed from the south-west.

The buttressed tower was built in the 15th century.



Below: The two stone sculptures of angels are at the foot of the chancel arch, on either side.

They are carrying the bread and wine, symbolising the Body and Blood of Christ.



Above: This stained glass window is at the far (east) end of the chancel, and depicts the Crucifixion and the Last Supper.

Sedlescombe is now well known for the Pestalozzi Childrens Village which was founded in 1959, on the site of Oaklands, to the south of village. Oaklands was the main residence of artist Hercules Brabazon who inherited estates in Ireland and Durham as well as Oaklands.

The Childrens Village is named after Johann Pestalozzi, a Swiss educationalist who founded several international orphanages. It caters for some 100 students from such diverse areas as India, Nepal, Tibet, the far east, and the middle east.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Brede

### v) Westfield

Westfield is one of the largest parishes in the Rother area, with a population count of almost 2,700 in 2009. This is a far cry from the 7 villagers and 1 cottager with 3 ploughs shown in the Domesday Book of 1086, where the village is recorded as Westewelle. At that time, the manor was held by Wibert from the Count of Eu. The church at Westfield, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, but it was certainly built in its original form, of a nave and small chancel, by the early 12th century.

Right: A view from the nave of St. John the Baptist, looking towards the chancel. The rounded arch is a classic example of Norman architecture, and is distinguishable from the ensuing Gothic, by the latter's characteristic pointed arches. The small squints on either side of the chancel arch were cut through the 32 inches of stone when the chancel was extended in 1251, and allowed the vicar to be seen from the congregation seated in the nave.



It is not possible to be exact about a construction date for the church using its architecture, as the styles developed progressively rather than fitting into neat time periods. Norman nobles influenced Anglo-Saxon architecture even before the Conquest, and Edward the Confessor, who had been brought up in Normandy, used Norman masons on construction of Westminster Abbey.

Right: St. John the Baptist, Westfield, from the west.

The tower was built in the late 12th century, and the huge buttresses were added the following century. The 2 arches show the difference between Norman and Gothic styles. The pointed arch to the doorway is gothic, whilst the window arch to the left has been built in 'Norman' style, although it was actually part of the vestry which was added in the 17th century.



Early records mentioning the church of St. John the Baptist, Westfield indicate its close ties to nearby Battle Abbey. As already mentioned, Domesday shows the manor to be in the hands of Wibert, and this is followed by record of a gift from William FitzWibert (Fitz = son of) at the time of Ralph Luffa who was Bishop of Chichester from 1091 to 1123/4 and whose Deed of Confirmation of the gift emphasises that the 'Ordeal by Water', legally belonging to the church, should only be administered by the Abbot of Battle and his monks.

Further reference to Battle Abbey and Westfield church is found when Abbot Walter de Luci, who was elected on 8th January 1139 and remained Abbot until his death on 21st June 1171, bought the church at Westfield and its surrounding estates. The Benedictine monks from the Abbey also lived at the moated Westfield Manor, now the location of Church Place Farm.

The Ordeal by Water mentioned above was an archaic method of ascertaining an accused person's guilt by throwing them into a pond or river, and observing whether they struggled or swam. Persons lucky enough to be good swimmers were pronounced innocent! An alternative test was making the accused plunge their bare arm into boiling water, guilt being shown by a scalded arm! These tests were used for the commonalty, whilst nobility were tried with the 'Ordeal by Fire'.

Right: The unusual font dates from the 14th century.

Below left: The beautiful reredos, a wooden screen behind the altar, has carved figures of Christ with the Archangels Gabriel and Michael on either side of Him. The reredos was installed in 1935.

Below right: The brass lectern came from Westfield Place in 1936







Left and below: Two other interesting items at St. John the Baptist.

The wall mounted organ is in the chancel, and is finely decorated in blue and brown, as is the chancel roof. Just visible to the bottom right is one of two small windows which were part of the original Norman building. The circular window at the east end of the north aisle took the form of a spoked wheel before being reglazed with stained glass in the 20th century.





## The Towns and Villages near the River Tillingham

### i) Beckley and Beckley Furnace

The blast furnace at Beckley was built in 1578, in the area which came to be known as Beckley Furnace, in order to make use of the water power from the River Tillingham to work the furnace bellows. Despite damming of rivers to create furnace ponds, there were times when lack of rain meant that there was insufficient water power to create a blast from the furnace bellows. This happened at Beckley, along with Robertsbridge and Waldron, in December 1743. Furnace workers had to tread the water mill in an effort to keep the furnace working, leading to coining of the word treadmill.

The furnace at Beckley produced cannons for the navy up until 1770 when it suffered the same fate as other Weald ironworks and closed, being unable to compete with the coal fired ironworks near to the coalfields in other parts of the country.

Glass was also manufactured at Beckley in the Middle Ages.

Right and below: Three views at Beckley Furnace, which, in the author's opinion, is the most delightful little hamlet in the Rother area.

The top photograph, taken from Furnace Lane, the minor road through the hamlet, shows the River Tillingham in the foreground. Bottom left is a general view, looking north-east on Furnace Lane, and bottom right is Tillingham Lodge.



Right: The tower of All Saints Church, Beckley is 11th century and includes unusual herringbone brickwork at ground floor level, suggesting that some of the building may even be Anglo-Saxon.

The spire is also thought to be 11th century, and was recently re-roofed with new shingle tiles.

Parts of the wall to the south aisle are 13th century, and much of the remainder is 14th century.

The small dormer windows, seen opposite on the south facing roof slope, are an unusual feature for a parish church roof. There are two similar windows on the northern side.



Other interesting and unusual features of this charming little church are shown above and right..

Lecterns with an integral pew behind are uncommon, but this one at All Saints also has a seat in front of the lectern, making it a rare item indeed.

The large chest made from a hollowed-out tree trunk, and fitted with iron bands, is thought to be over 800 years old.

The fluted font, made from Sussex marble, is 18th century and replaced a 12th century one. Surviving fragments of the earlier font show that it was also fluted, an unusual feature and the only one in Sussex.



Beckley is an ancient village, being mentioned in the will of Alfred the Great, King of the West Saxons from 871 to his death on 26 October 899. In his will, Alfred bequeathed the Manor of Beccanleah, (Anglo-Saxon for Beckley), to Osferthe whom he referred to as 'his Kinsman'.

After the Conquest a period of relative stability ensued for the village, until the Black Death from 1348 to 1350 caused devastation, as it did to most of England. This probably explains why most of the houses are built away from the churchyard. The Wealden iron industry brought a period of wealth to the area, and the village thrived. Unfortunately this ended with the closing of the Beckley furnace in 1770, and by the 1830s things were so difficult for the local population that no fewer than 165 Beckley residents emigrated to Australia.

One such emigrant family were the Smiths. Thomas was a farm worker from Beckley, and his wife Maria (nee Sherwood) was born at Peasmarsh. Together with their five surviving children, they arrived at Sydney, New South Wales aboard the Lady Nugent on 27 November 1838.

In 1855/6 Thomas and Maria Smith bought, at a cost of £605, approximately 24 acres of land in the Ryde district, for growing fruit, which flourished in the area.

Australian records indicate that, in 1868, 2 years before her death, Maria Smith showed another local orchardist, a new variety of seedling apple which had, she said, developed from some French crab apples being grown in Tasmania.

Maria's new apple was not recognised until after her death, but 'Smith's seedling' was exhibited in 1890 at the Castle Hill Agricultural and Horticultural show, and the following year it won first prize for cooking apples.

In 1895 the NSW Department of Agriculture named '**Granny Smith's Seedling**' as a suitable variety for export.

It is now, of course, one of the best known cooking apples.

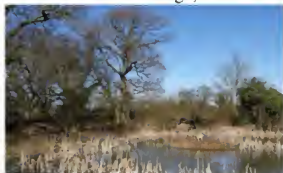
## The Towns and Villages near the River Tillingham

### ii) Udimore

A church and 2 acres of meadow at Udimore were recorded in the Domesday survey, just 20 years after the Conquest, indicating the existence there of either a Saxon church or a very early Norman one. It may be that a Saxon building, constructed in wood, was sacked at the time of the Conquest, prompting rebuilding in stone, by the new Norman landowners. If this was the case, the new church was still under construction or being extended in the early 12th century, evidenced by surviving parts of the Norman structure.

The church was sited on the ridge of land between the Brede and Tillingham river valleys, adjacent to a very early manor house, Court Lodge, and both were jointly surrounded by a moat, two sections of which are still visible. The actual manor house was dismantled 'brick by brick' in 1912 and re-erected at Groombridge, near Tunbridge Wells, in Kent.

Right: A view of one section of the moat which formerly surrounded both the church and the manor house.



Court Lodge seems to have been an important residence from an early time.

It was visited by both King Edward I, who reigned from 1272 until 1307, and by his grandson Edward III, whose Queen, Phillippa of Hainault, watched the Battle of Les Espagnols sur Mer in the English Channel from the manor estate.

Later, on August 15th 1479, a royal licence to crenellate was granted, and Court Lodge became a fortified manor house.

Right: The view from Court Lodge Farm, Udimore out to sea, which Queen Phillippa would have had on 29th August 1350 when she witnessed the sea battle which the King commanded. Also known as the Battle of Winchelsea, The Battle of Les Espagnols sur Mer was a classic medieval sea battle at the time of the Hundred Years' war, when the Castilians were supporting the French. It was a decisive victory for Edward III and his son Edward, the Black Prince, although there were also heavy losses on the English side.



The Church of St. Mary, Udimore dates from early Norman times, although much was rebuilt in 1220, when the chancel was added. The tower was constructed shortly afterwards, c1230, and there were further alterations and renewals in the following centuries.

The church came under the control of Robertsbridge Abbey from 1275 until Henry VIII's dissolution, when it passed to the Sydney family.



Left: A view from the nave looking back towards the tower, where the organ is mounted on a gallery. In the foreground is the traditional font and cover.

Right: St. Mary's is also home to a second font, with an intriguing history. This 'pudding basin' style font is in fact made from wood, which is forbidden under a Reformation edict. It was therefore disguised as a stone font by plastering and by coating the bowl inside with lead paint. When restored in the 20th century, a section was left untreated to show the 'forgery'.



Left: This lancet window is in the south porch wall above the door. The stained glass depicts Madonna and Child and is dedicated to George Ernest Frewer, who was vicar from 1897 to 1903 and was also Rector at Brede, and Prebendary of Fittleworth in Chichester Cathedral.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Dudwell

### i) Burwash

The modern history of Burwash surrounds the 17th century ironmaster's house, Batemans, which stands down the hill to the south of the main village in the idyllic Sussex countryside of the Dudwell valley.

Right: Batemans was built c1634 for the local ironmaster. The first recorded occupant, at the end of 17th century, was one John Brittan, who was actually an iron dealer.

It was, though, in 1902, that Batemans became home to its most celebrated owner, author Rudyard Kipling, who paid £9,300 for the house and outbuildings, the mill, and 33 acres.



Kipling and his American wife Carrie loved the peace and tranquility of the grounds at Batemans, where they set about creating formal gardens. Kipling's design, which can still be viewed in his study, included the rose garden, pond and yew hedges, and the work was paid for out of the £7,700 he received for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907.

Left: The River Dudwell flowing through the grounds at Batemans, just downstream from the mill.

Right: The mill at Batemans. The current building was constructed c1750, and replaced a much earlier one which Kipling believed dated from 1196. Records show, however, that 2 mills were built, by Royal Command, in the years 1246-1248. The mill was restored between 1968 and 1975 and is now open to the public.





Rudyard Kipling was born in 1865 in British India when it was still part of the Empire, and much of his work reflects this Indian and British Imperialist background. Some of his best known works are the fictional tales:

The Jungle Book ( a collection of stories including Rikki-Tikki-Tavi )

Kim ( a tale of adventure )

Just So Stories ( written for his daughter Josephine )

The Man Who Would Be King

and the poems:

Mandalay

Gunga Din

and most famous of all:

If

**'If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you.....**

**.....Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son.'**

Despite becoming the most famous author and poet in the English-speaking world, and accruing immense wealth, Kipling knew great personal tragedy. His elder daughter, Josephine, died at the age of six from pneumonia, and then 16 years later, in 1915, his son was killed in action at the Battle of Loos.

Batemans was the perfect escape for Rudyard and his wife. They made it their private sanctuary until Rudyard's death in 1936. Carrie remained at their personal haven until she died 3 years later, when she bequeathed the estate to the National Trust in memory of her late husband.

Batemans is open to the public from Easter to October.

There are other historic buildings in the pretty tree-lined High Street, some of which pre-date Batemans. The Manor House of Burghurst is at the eastern end of the High Street, opposite the Parish Church of St. Bartholomew, Burwash.

Right: St. Bartholomew's from across the main road at Burwash.

The church tower is Norman, dating from c1090, whilst the south aisle is late 12th century, and the original chancel and the north aisle were 13th century. In the mid 19th century, restoration work included rebuilding the chancel. Thankfully, this work was undertaken sympathetically, recreating the chancel in 13th century style.





Left: The octagonal font has the Pelham family crest sculpted on it, indicating the connection of the family to Burwash. John de Pelham was one of the captors of King John of France at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356, and seized him by the buckle of his sword belt, leading to the King's surrender. In recognition, King Edward III bestowed a buckle to John de Pelham as a crest. The Pelham family held the manor of Burwash for many years and went on to become Constables of Pevensey Castle, and to represent Sussex in parliament. Later descendants were Earls of Chichester, and sat in the House of Lords as Baron Pelham.



The walls in St. Bartholomew's are hung with some interesting artefacts. Right; This plaque, with inscription in latin, commemorates Johannes Cason de Pelham who died in 1675.

Left; This bronze plaque is in memory of John Kipling, only son of Rudyard. He died at the Battle of Loos in 1915, at the age of 18, whilst serving as a lieutenant in the second battalion, the Irish Guards.



Near right; This cast-iron grave-slab, formerly on the floor, is thought to date from the 14th century, and to be the oldest example of a Sussex cast-iron sepulchral slab. The inscription, in Lombardic lettering of early 14th century type, says 'Orate P. Annema Jhone Collins', ( pray for the soul of John Collins ), indicating that this was the grave of a member of the family of an ironmaster named Collins, who ran a forge at Socknersh, between Burwash and Brightling.



Far right: The other slab, which hangs next to the Collins slab, shows the figure of an unknown person, and dates from c1440.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Dudwell

### ii) Burwash Common/Weald

This village is really two hamlets which overlap one another on the Heathfield to Burwash road. The village sign says Burwash Common when you approach from the west, but the sign at the other end of the village, when you are coming from the east, tells you that you are entering Burwash Weald. There is no defining line in the middle, and the two hamlets, formerly part of Burwash, were formed into one parish in 1877.

This is one village in which the church is not the oldest building, St. Phillip's having been built in 1867.

Much of the village history centres around the Wheel public house built c1760. Prior to this a building, which became a public house called the 'Catherine Wheel', was built on the site possibly as far back as the 13th century. Burwash Weald was formerly named Burwash Wheel, and was only renamed when the church commissioners decided that it was inappropriate to have their poorhouse named after a public house.

The Catherine Wheel is not an uncommon name for a public house, especially in Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds. It is derived from the spiked chariot wheel used to torture St. Catherine, in an attempt to break her Christian faith. Catherine was born c294 AD in Alexandria, Egypt, and whilst some believe that she was martyred in 307 AD, the alternative view is that she survived and was responsible for the construction, in 337 AD, of a chapel around the burning bush site where God spoke to Moses, and which is now the location of the Greek Orthodox Monastery named after her. The semi-monastic order of the Knights of Mount Sinai was formed in honour of St. Catherine in 1063. The Knights wore a white tunic embroidered with a broken wheel armed with spikes, and the depiction on The Wheel public house sign at Burwash Weald is said to be taken from the coat of arms of the Knights of St Catherine of Sinai.

St. Catherine's Day is November 25th each year, and in England it has also come to be used to commemorate Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon.

With the demise of the local iron industry in the early 1800s, employment opportunities were very limited, leading to an escalation in smuggling and highway robbery. The Wheel became further embroiled in the lawlessness, and is said to have earned a reputation as being 'the roughest pub in the south-east'.

Right: The parish church of St. Phillip's, Burwash Weald.



## The Towns and Villages near the River Limden

### i) Stonegate

The early history of the Stonegate area is centred around Bardown to the north of the village where a Roman ironworking site was established c140 AD. Excavations there in the 1960s indicated that an area of some 7 acres had been utilised for the iron industry. The High Weald provided the essential natural resources of timber and iron ore needed to maintain production of iron.

The settlement at Bardown included living accommodation as well as the forges and furnaces. During the lifetime of the ironworks, which seems to have been about 100 years, a slag heap 100 metres long by 50m wide, and up to 3m deep, was formed along the bank of the River Limden.

It appears that the Bardown 'residential' area continued to be occupied after the ironworks closed, with workers travelling out a few miles to new surrounding forges where iron ore and timber were still available.

Right: The Church of St. Peter, Stonegate. The church was built in 1904 to replace one that had been poorly constructed in 1838.

The present building is very aesthetically pleasing, with a large, unique tower that has a weatherboarded belfry section, a spire, and a canopied clock.



The Stonegate area became agricultural again after the Roman ironworks closed. It was part of the Robertsbridge Abbey estates during Norman times, and passed on to the Sidney family with the demise of the Abbey in 1539 under Henry VIII's dissolution. Sir William Sydney was a courtier to Henry VIII. He held the office of Chamberlain and Steward of the Household to King Edward VI, son of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour. The Sydney's main residence was at Penshurst Place, in Kent.



The more recent local history at Stonegate revolves around eggs! In 1926, farmers at Stonegate formed an egg cooperative to pack and market their eggs. 30 years later the government set up The Egg Marketing Board to purchase, grade, and market all eggs produced in the UK. Eggs were stamped with a 'lion' logo as a mark of quality, and the board introduced a £12m advertising campaign with the famous slogan "Go to work on an egg". The board closed in 1971 and the 'little lion' disappeared until revived in 1998. Stonegate Farmers became one of the two largest egg producers in the UK, supplying major customers such as Sainsburys and Waitrose.

## The Towns and Villages near the River Limden

### ii) Ticehurst

The earliest record of the Ticehurst area is of a grant, made in 1018 by King Cnut, of land at Haeselsersc (now Hazelhurst) to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Domesday Book records the area as Haslesse, and confirms that it was held by Walter Fitz-Lambert, Lord of Crowhurst. Walter's grandson, Lambert de Scoteni, was the owner of Scotney Castle at nearby Lamberhurst, in Kent.

Hazelhurst was an area of Ticehurst parish to the north of the village, now known as Three Leg Cross where Hazelhurst Farm is on Huntley Mill Road. Also on this lane was Dunster's Mill, which was a very rare 'overdrift' watermill having a 12' diameter by 6'8" wide overshot waterwheel.

In 1968, the Medway Water Board applied for permission to dam the River Bawl to create the 770 acre Bawl Bridge Reservoir (now Bawl Water). Although granted, one condition attached to the permission

obliged the water company to move the 14th century Dunsters Mill House, which would have otherwise ended up below the waterline, some half a mile up the lane. This was duly undertaken and the house now sits on new foundations, with lovely views over the reservoir, near to the present day northern end of Huntley Mill Road.

Right: 'The End of the Road'. Bawl water is the largest inland water in the south-east and is now a top tourist destination. Visitor attractions include sailing, canoeing, windsurfing, fly fishing, sub aqua, bicycle hire and walking.



Ticehurst has a number of other old houses, one such being Pashley Manor, shown below. Pashlev Manor Gardens extend to 11 acres and are said to be 'one of the finest gardens in England'. They are open to the public from 1st April to 30th September.



The house itself has considerable history. A moated manor was first built on the site in 1292 by the de Passele family, who held it until it was bought by the Bullen family from Norfolk in 1453. The Bullen family name changed to Boleyn, and Pashley was still in their hands when Anne became Henry VIII's second queen. It is believed that Anne stayed at Pashley during her

childhood. When Anne was executed in 1536 the Boleyn family fell from grace, and a local ironmaster bought the estate and constructed the present manor house.



Right: St. Mary the Virgin, Ticehurst.

The earliest documents which mention a church at Ticehurst date from 1180 when the vicar was one Adam, and 1197, but most of the current building is 14th century, suggesting that much reconstruction took place at that time. The Etchingham family, who rebuilt the church at Etchingham in 1363, may well have gone on to undertake similar works at Ticehurst, as their family arms appear in the porch ceiling stonework and in a stained glass window.



Left: The chancel arch and rood screen which was carved in 1916, in Frant. Originally there would have been a rood gallery, accessed by stairs at the left of the chancel arch (the opening remains). The rood gallery supported the Great Rood, a sculptural representation of the Crucifixion.

Right: Another view of the chancel, showing arches to the North (Courthope) and South (Pashley) family chapels. There are memorials to the Mays in the Pashley Chapel, but none to the Pashley or Boleyn families.



Beneath the Courthope Chapel is the family vault of the Courthopes who held Whiligh Manor, which became a separate manor in the reign of Edward III, having previously been part of Ticehurst Manor. The extensive estate straddled parts of Ticehurst and Wadhurst parishes.

Left: A wall plaque commemorating a member of the Courthope family.



Two interesting items are displayed near the Courthope Chapel. Below left is a funeral bier, in use until after the 2nd World War, and below right is a Sussex farm worker's smock.



St. Mary's also has a large number of pew kneelers, lovingly decorated by local residents. The kneelers are worked in needlepoint, and include such varied themes as the two shown below. On the left are depictions of birds, and on the right local scenes.



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